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"The Press Gang. The Bloody Press!"

PRIVATEERS OF '76

By RALPH D. PAINE

Author of "Blackbeard, Buccaneer"

Illustrated by
Frank E. Schoonover

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Privateers of '76

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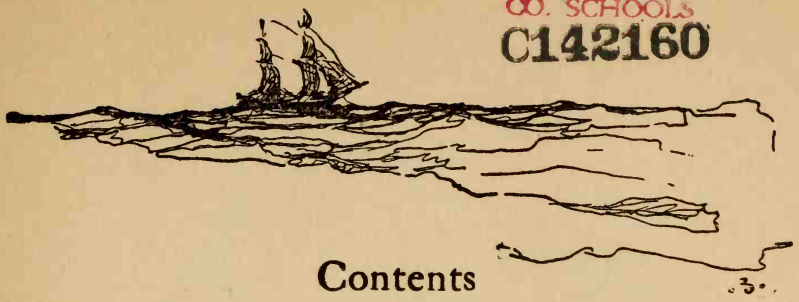

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OCT 28 1942

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Privateers of '76

CHAPTER I

THE FAMOUS CLAGHORN NOSE IS DAMAGED

OLD SALEM was a famous seaport in the year of 1775. Where Derby Wharf stretched a long arm into the harbor, the brigs and sloops, ships and schooners were moored in tiers. A confusion of spars lifted above the timbered warehouses which were filled with merchandise from Europe, Virginia, and the West Indies. Derby Street, down by the water, was given over to the stirring business of the mariner; tarry rigging lofts whose music was the whir of yarn spindles and the tap-tap of serving mallets, sheds where hammer

and anvil played another tune; wooden shops, hip-roofed and gabled, which sold nautical instruments and charts, boots and pea-jackets, and all manner of ship-chandlery.

True it was that the New England pioneers, a hostile wilderness at their backs, had courageously turned to furrow the sea instead of the soil.

Young Stephen Claghorn sat staring at the backlog in the wide fireplace and was very grateful for its warmth. Two long hours had he shivered and yawned through a sermon in the bleak South Meeting House with no other comfort than his mother's tiny foot-stove. She was a pious woman, as well as a very pretty one, and deemed it proper and good for the soul to suffer hardship in the place of worship. The February cold was whetted to a keener edge by an easterly breeze which came sweeping across the snowy ramparts of Naumkeag Head and the sea beyond.

His active enjoyments forbidden on the Lord's Day, Stephen decided to toast his shins a while and then wander out for a sedate stroll with a companion or two. One look at him and you would have wasted no sympathy on a youth so plump and rosy who could not appear dismal to save himself. Even a Puritan Sabbath could not wipe the good-nature from his round face nor kill that hearty laugh which exploded at the most unexpected times. He was not soft of body, however, as other Salem boys discovered when they called him " Fatty " Claghorn which he resented as a mortal insult.

The Famous Claghorn Nose is Damaged

At sixteen he was growing into the pattern of his big-bodied, jovial father, Captain Joel Claghorn, who had lost his life in a stubborn sea fight with a French privateer off the Isles of Shoals.

Stephen was not surprised when the godly quietude of the house was broken by the tattoo of the brass door-knocker. It would be some gentleman come to call on his mother of a Sunday afternoon. Mistress Polly Claghorn, five years a widow, had not lost her youthful charm and winsome ways. Her smile had a sparkle, and in her blue eyes was now and then a glint of mischief. Nor was it to be overlooked that she had been left a handsome property, shares in merchant vessels, and a square brick mansion set behind a walled garden. It faced the harbor, and the box-bordered walks and smooth turf almost lipped the tide. The round columns of the white portico had once braved the gales as the top-masts of a Claghorn ship.

A black serving maid opened the door to admit a man of dashing demeanor, fastidiously attired, whose cheek was tanned by tropic suns. The powdered queue, blue coat with gilt buttons, sprigged waistcoat and velvet knee-breeches set off to advantage the well-knit figure of Captain Spencer Colt, owner and master of the brig *Atlantic*. He had just now returned from a trading voyage to the island of Trinidad. He greeted young Stephen amiably but with a touch of careless patronage, and they stood chatting before the fire.

The boy was eager to hear of new adventures and they would lose none of their thrill when told by the bold Captain Colt. Youth is quick to detect the smallest grain of vanity or boasting in its elders. Stephen had already found subdued amusement in noting that this successful shipmaster held a high opinion of himself and his valor, and was a lion among the ladies. A question and he declaimed, with a fine gesture of the beruffled hand:

"Pirates, my lad? Did we fall afoul of them this voyage? What else would you call the rascals? A strange schooner bore in chase of us in the Old Straits of Bahama, first hoisting a union jack and then flying a tricolor. Finding ourselves clear of Key Laboas, we took in steering sails, wore ship, hauled up our courses and piped all hands to quarters. Time to give the blackguards a dose of medicine, eh, Stephen? The schooner passed under our lee and a fellow hailed us in broken English, ordering the captain to come aboard with his papers and using the vilest language I ever heard. As he passed we poured a whole broadside into him with great effect. And before he had got out of range we had cut his sails to rags and cleared his decks of all but a dozen men. My gunners played the deuce with him. He will know better next time, the scurvy pest. Stand up 'em and they are apt to turn tail like curs."

"He ought to have known better than to engage

Captain Spencer Colt," said Stephen, with a naughty chuckle. " Was your brig much cut up, sir? "

" Oh, a few trifling wounds—splinters flying—a gun dismounted. Such small skirmishes serve to put American seamen on their mettle. They will be at war ere long, my boy, in deadly grapple with Great Britain, the sovereign of the seas. The conflict rolls up as black as a thunder-cloud. All signs portend it. Salem is openly rebellious, they tell me, defying the royal governor and ready to muster its men under arms."

" The town has been quiet since General Gage scuttled back to Boston," regretfully explained Stephen. " It was fine sport for a time, after General Gage had moved his headquarters to Salem and was suppressing the town meetings and arresting the committee of defense. He swore and he blustered like a buccaneer. He was going to put down this damnable sedition if it took twenty thousand British regulars. The town laughed at him and did as it pleased. The men of Salem, Marblehead and Beverly found muskets aplenty and drilled by night."

" I am aware of the defiant message they sent to General Gage," said Captain Colt, " that they were ready to receive any attacks they might be exposed to for acting in pursuance of the laws and interests of their country, as became patriots and Christians. He is a blundering fool but I doubt if he tries their tempers again. One spark may touch off a prodigious blaze."

Stephen went on to air his own views but the gallant mariner became inattentive. His ear had caught the swish of petticoats upon the staircase. He turned to make a low bow of obeisance to Mistress Claghorn and paid no more heed to her son. The fair widow dimpled and blushed at the compliments that showered her, for Captain Colt was an ardent suitor and had a nimble wit.

They sought a high-backed settle in the chimney corner, leaving Stephen to his own devices. It was not tactful of him to linger in the offing. This was quite apparent. He was about to depart when the door-knocker thumped again, this time with a certain timidity. The visitor proved to be Ben Gerrish, the schoolmaster, a pale, serious person clad in black who displayed signs of nervousness when Stephen let him in.

" My compliments to—er—to your mother, if she is at home," faltered this admirer.

" She will be mightily pleased, and so will Captain Spencer Colt," replied the son, keeping a straight face and smothering one of his unfortunate " haw, haw, haws." " Of course I fancied you might be anxious to improve your mind by talking with me, Master Gerrish."

" Captain Spencer Colt? " echoed the schoolmaster. Dubiously he rubbed his chin. " An overbearing, quarrelsome man, Stephen. He bears that reputation. Not that I fear him, but any bickering in a lady's house would be so unseemly ——"

"Fiddlesticks! If he scowls, offer to fight him with broadswords on Gallows Hill," urged Stephen. "Take my word for it, he will flinch from cold steel."

"You bloodthirsty young rogue," exclaimed Ben Gerrish who was no coward but a shy man by nature. "Such manners and morals were never learned in my schoolroom. Pilot the way, then, if your mother will not think me an intrusion."

Just then a gun boomed from a ship at the wharf. They halted, gazed at each other, and waited. A brief interval and they heard the report of another signal gun. Even as they dashed for the door, a church bell rang out in a furious, jangling alarum. It was promptly echoed from another steeple. Thin and sweet in the frosty air came the distant notes of a bugle.

The schoolmaster's long legs tarried not another instant but carried him out and along the stone walk in a series of leaps. His black coat-tails fluttered in the wind. After him bolted Stephen Claghorn whose solid bulk handicapped him for such a sprinting match as this. He pounded into Essex Street where the people were already buzzing like angry hornets. An elderly merchant came clattering down from his lodgings over the shop, a musket in one hand, a powder-horn in the other. Three seamen charged out of the back-room of a tavern and buckled on cutlasses as they ran.

Stephen had quickly surmised what kind of trouble was in the wind. And now he dodged aside barely in

time to avoid being knocked down by a horse which wheeled at a gallop into the crowded street. The rider was a man of sturdy build and strong voice who flogged the flank of his horse with the flat of a sword. Pulling rein at the edge of the common, he bellowed:

"The British have landed on Marblehead beach—Colonel Leslie's battalion! They march on Salem to seize the cannon and powder stored in the Derby warehouse by the Provincial Congress. Rally, men, and stop 'em at the North Bridge. Don't give up the guns."

Those within ear-shot raised a brave huzza. The messenger rode on to carry the warning to the outskirts of the town. Soon the breathless Stephen Claghorn overtook the schoolmaster who had rushed into his own dwelling to reappear with a most formidable bell-mouthed blunderbuss which might have been shouldered by Miles Standish himself.

"Lord save us, Ben Gerrish, do you expect to fire that old carronade?" panted the grinning lad. "She will kick you clear across the mud flats."

"This weapon throws a heavy weight of metal," was the grim answer, "though I have never tried to discharge it. Held true, it may spoil the march for a redcoat or two."

"And I have no weapon at all," lamented Stephen, "and how can I get me a big British soldier unless I take him alive with my bare hands?"

"For your mother's sake, keep out of harm's way,"

severely chided Ben Gerrish. "This is no game for roly-poly boys."

Stephen trotted on in sulky silence until they joined the crowd of hastily armed men who moved in the direction of the small stream making up from Salem harbor. Hither led the road from Marblehead. The patriots first to reach this strategic barrier had already raised the drawbridge where the tide ran swift and deep. The schoolmaster hurried forward to join a company of militia, commanded by Colonel Timothy Pickering, which was assembling at the bridge with orders to fire at the word.

Through the crowd squirmed and twisted Stephen Claghorn until he had gained the very edge of the open bridge. This was no lawless rabble but a gathering of patriot volunteers under competent leaders. They had sternly resolved to suffer no further invasions of their rights and liberties. They cheered when riders brought the news that the Marblehead regiment of militia, mostly sailors and fishermen, had been mustered under arms and that the minutemen of Danvers were actually on the march.

Then a hush of tense expectancy stilled the clamor until the column of British infantry came sturdily tramping along the road from the sea-coast, all keeping step to the beat of the drum. Scarlet coats, tall caps, white cross-belts, bayonets gleaming, they made a splendid show.

With two other lads, Stephen Claghorn had scrambled up the timbers of the lifted drawbridge but now they scrambled down. They had no desire to be the easiest targets for a volley from the close-locked ranks of His Majesty's Fifty-ninth Foot. The battalion advanced as if on parade, expecting no opposition, until it was suddenly halted by the tidal stream and the lack of a bridge to cross it.

The commander, Colonel Leslie, stood glowering at the swarm of angry citizenry on the other side of the water and was evidently perplexed. He had no orders to force a passage. The situation was both delicate and awkward. A weather-beaten shipmaster of Salem made a trumpet of his hands and roared:

"You had better not fire, for every man of us is ready to die in this strife."

The pastor of the North Church, having come in his black cap and gown from the afternoon service, implored Colonel Leslie not to provoke bloodshed.

"You cannot commit this violation against innocent people, here on this holy day, without sinning against God and humanity. Let me intreat you to return."

Hoping to frighten the stubborn patriots, the British colonel threatened to clear the road with musketry fire. There were taunts, insults, and yells of:

"Fire and be damned to you!"

"Red jackets, lobster coats, cowards!"

The Famous Claghorn Nose is Damaged

" Away with you and your accursed government."

A parley followed while Colonel Leslie argued that he was in lawful use of the king's highway and that those who dared obstruct it did so at their peril. The gravity of the situation was upset and there were gusts of laughter when Dame Sarah Tarrant poked her head out of a cottage window near by and shrilly cried:

" Go home and tell your knavish master he has sent you on a fool's errand, and broken the peace of our Sabbath. What? D'ye think we were born in the woods to be scared by owls? Shoot me if you have the courage, but I doubt it."

The heated argument was resumed and neither party would give ground. Sword in hand, Colonel Leslie was in no mood to spend the afternoon in this undignified wrangling. Again he swore to carry out his errand if he had to use bullets and bayonets. Captain Richard Derby, in whose warehouse the cannon were stored, advanced to the front and defied the invaders to do their worst. He was a man past sixty years, wearing a huge white wig, and his voice rang out as if he were upon his own quarter-deck:

" Find the cannon if you can! Take them if you can! They will never be surrendered! "

It now occurred to the irate British colonel to try to set his men across the stream in boats. His demands that the drawbridge be lowered had been jeered at. To join battle with these undaunted volunteers of Salem

and so arouse the whole colony in bloody rebellion was a responsibility which he felt loth to assume without the approval of his master, General Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts.

Several quick-witted patriots had foreseen the attempt to capture boats. It was advisable to clear the stream of all craft which might be employed by the enemy in ferrying over. Among the first to run along the bank and tumble into a ship's yawl was Stephen Claghorn who had filled his pockets with chunks of stone as missiles in case of need. Close behind him was Benjamin Gerrish, the militant schoolmaster. Stephen's heart had warmed to this lanky, serious person who had shown himself a comrade to tie to in a pinch.

It had not escaped their notice, even amidst the swirling excitement, that the debonair Captain Spencer Colt hovered in the background. Although he was as martial a figure as the crowd could show, he seemed a trifle cautious of exposing himself and the embroidered waistcoat to British musket balls at pointblank range. And when Stephen shouted to him to come and help seize the boats, he was too busy giving advice to others. Stephen laughed and said to himself that fine feathers did not always make fine birds.

He caught up an oar and aided the others in shoving the yawl clear of the mud. Paddling a few strokes, they gained the opposite side of the stream. The purpose was to tow out of reach several dories and two broad

gondolas or barges. British soldiers were hurrying from the highway to drive them back. The schoolmaster stood up to menace the foe with his ancient blunderbuss but the weight of it overbalanced him and he splashed into the tide, heels over head.

Stephen emitted a loud " haw, haw," but found that this was no time for mirth. As he jumped from the deck of a barge to cut the mooring line, a squad of redcoats slid pell-mell down the slippery bank. To Stephen they looked to be ten feet high and their bayonets were wicked beyond words.

Before he could slash the rope and let the barge float away, three British soldiers were on the deck. Stephen was not alone, however, for reinforcements came piling after him, hardy men of Salem unafraid of a rough-and-tumble scrimmage at close quarters. And from the stream emerged the schoolmaster, uttering war-whoops, mud in his eyes and weeds in his hair.

Forbidden to fire, the redcoats strove to use bayonet and butt to clear the barge but there was scant room to swing a musket on the crowded bit of deck. The mêlée was like a series of furious wrestling matches. Stephen Claghorn went down and was made a football of but his body was well cushioned and he bobbed up again with sundry bruises. A tall British regular and a pious deacon of the North Church went overboard hugging each other like two bears.

Another soldier stepped back and found space to

thrust. The long bayonet was knocked aside but it ripped the shirt of one Joseph Whicher who worked in a distillery and left a red scratch on his breast. First blood was drawn in the American Revolution!

Resolved to sell his life dearly, Stephen Claghorn let fly with a cobblestone and smote a soldier in the belt. Retaliation was swift and painful. The indignant Britisher grunted, doubled up for a moment, and then drove the musket butt at the young warrior's head.

Abruptly Stephen ceased to take part in the defense of his native soil. When he came to his senses he was holding his nose with one hand and rubbing an eye with the other. His face seemed to be a grievous misfit and his brain still whirled like a fiery top. Dizzily he blinked at the landscape and beheld the British infantry marching in retreat, keeping step to the rattle of the drums, along the road whence they had come. Colonel Leslie had wisely decided to reimbark his battalion in the transport and return to Boston.

A feeble grin of rejoicing spread over the damaged features of plump Stephen Claghorn. He wiped a smear of blood with his coat-sleeve, tried to staunch his nose, and discovered that he had been carried ashore from the deserted barge and was sitting propped against the picket fence of Dame Tarrant's cottage.

The drawbridge had been lowered. The militiamen were dispersing with cheers and the harmless discharge of muskets. They had made history at the Salem North

Bridge on this winter afternoon of 1775. The cannon and munitions were safe and unmolested in the Derby warehouse.

Out of the cottage came the schoolmaster with a can of hot water and cloth for bandages. With him was Dame Tarrant, still scolding the redcoats and cackling at their discomfiture. Deftly and tenderly she ministered to the battered youth. Along came that other wounded hero, Joseph Whicher, and demanded that he, too, should have a bandage to show.

"Wait a bit, Joe," chided the dame. "A man as fond of the stuff he makes as you be will bleed rum. 'Tis good for ye to let a little out."

Stephen insisted that he could walk home. In truth, it turned out to be more like a parade. Leaning on the schoolmaster's arm, he slowly trudged into Derby Street, one eye eclipsed by a bandage, while scores of men and boys trailed after as an escort. Until they grew tired of it they carried Joe Whicher upon their shoulders and saw that he lacked not a bottle of rum.

In this fashion did the only son return to his doting mother, Mistress Polly Claghorn. She almost swooned at the sight of him and indignantly dismissed his mob of admirers. She would have sent Joseph Whicher along with them. But Stephen protested in thick accents, because his front teeth were loosened:

"Tell Joe to come in, mother dear. He was wounded by a British bayonet. We are the casualties. Haw,

haw, you ought to have seen a whole battalion of regulars scamper back to Boston."

"Oh, oh, your poor face," wailed the mother. "And what were you doing, Ben Gerrish, to let my child expose himself and receive these dreadful hurts? Skulking, I suppose. Captain Spencer Colt was leading our brave townsmen, no doubt, else he would have watched over my Stephen."

"Wrong, quite wrong, ma'am, savin' your presence," rumbled honest Joseph Whicher, nervously hiding the bottle of rum behind him. "The devil himself couldn't ha' held the schoolmaster back, and he was right at the elbow of your fine big lubber of a lad. We done our duty, ma'am, and has the scars to prove it."

"Run and fetch a surgeon, Ben Gerrish," sharply quoth Mistress Claghorn. "You stand like a gawk while my boy may be dying of his wounds. I have no strength to remove those dreadful, bloody bandages."

"Steady, Mother,—never say die," mumbled her cheerful offspring. "No cause to raise such a row. A black eye is nothing, and a broken nose will mend. I gave one redcoat a belly-ache, and I'll bet it hurts him worse than this."

"A broken nose?" cried Mistress Claghorn, wringing her slender hands. "Disfigured for life! The beautiful Claghorn nose! Oh, I cannot bear it, Stephen."

"You won't have to, Mother. It is my nose. And what matters a nose with a crook or a bump to a man

who will be going to sea ere long to capture British ships? You had better enjoy me while you've got me."

"I shall never, never let you go to sea, Stephen, even if this horrid war does come to us. Whenever I think of your poor, dead father ——"

"Were he alive, he would not let me stay ashore," declared the chip of the old block, glaring out of the one good eye.

"Them that bears wounds inflicted by the brutal minions of King George," piped up Joe Whicher, "is entitled to speak with authority, ma'am. Having shed our blood for our country, this boy Steve and me is what you might call veterans. And we propose to keep on lickin' the condemned Britishers to the last drop of our blood."

"Hooray for you, Joe," laughed the rebellious Stephen, forgetting his aches and pains. "The Provincial Assembly never heard a better speech."

CHAPTER II

A STOUT LAD SIGNS THE SHIP'S ARTICLES

TWO months after this affair at the North Bridge the embattled farmers of Lexington and Concord fired the shots heard round the world. In June the minutemen were flocking to throw up the breastworks of Bunker Hill and hold their rude defenses against the charging columns of England's finest troops. Battles were fought and campaigns waged for more than a year before the Liberty Bell rang out the immortal tidings of the Declaration of Independence on the Fourth of July of 1776.

The mariners of Salem were not the men to be idle while the landsmen were enlisting under the flag of General George Washington. They had their own grudges to settle upon the high seas, vexatious trade laws which had crippled their commerce and the high-handed violence of British press gangs.

There was no American navy. Even later in the war, when a few small cruisers flew the ensign of the new republic, this feeble force was but a jest when matched against the fleets of frigates and three-deckers whose flaming broadsides had made the name of England

glorious afloat. But the New England ports and the stormy Atlantic had bred a race of superb seamen and skilled ship-builders. Swiftly, audaciously they turned to privateering as a weapon with which to harass and injure the foe.

History has somehow overlooked the part they played in winning the War of the Revolution. The fact is that these private armed ships dealt British maritime prestige the deadliest, most humiliating blows it had ever suffered.

The seafaring men and boys of Salem had never known peace or safety on blue water. Every merchant vessel carried a heavy battery and the crew was ready to fight to save its own skins in encounters with French and Spanish freebooters or the mongrel pirates of many races. It was a simple matter to sling more guns aboard and recruit additional men. The privateering commission empowered them lawfully to sail and to capture or destroy the enemy's commerce wherever found. No meek submission could be expected of sturdy British tars, provided their ships carried metal enough. It was a game of hazards and escapes, of hard fighting and the hope of rich booty taken in prizes.

One after another the Salem privateers rushed to sea like hawks. No lad of them all was more eager to sign articles and throw a leg into a hammock than Stephen Claghorn. Prolonged and distressing were the discussions with his mother who wept at the thought of letting

him go. He was all she had in the world and he was entirely too young to risk his precious life in a crew of swearing, drinking, reckless privateersmen. She had taken a vow that he should never follow the sea as long as she lived. Was she not a broken-hearted, blighted woman whom the cruel ocean had bereft of an adored husband?

If Stephen desired to serve his country, which was very noble of him, said she, there were influential friends who might secure him a warrant as a gentleman cadet in the army, perhaps with the staff of General Washington himself. Of course his first duty was to his widowed mother and, besides, there was no lack of grown men to fill the ranks, afloat and ashore.

All this seemed silly and selfish to the darling son, dutiful though he was, and when silenced by these reproaches he would glower and rub a bump on that Claghorn nose which was twisted a trifle to starboard. Much of his time was spent on Derby Wharf where he watched the sloops and brigs in the bustle of arming and refitting to cruise against the King. Cheerily, with deep-throated chorus and melodious cries of "yo, ho, ho," they sweated at the tackles and hoisted aboard carronades, Long Toms, nine-pounders, and the cases of pistols, muskets, boarding pikes, tomahawks, or trundled up the plank the barrows of hand grenades, round shot, grape and canister.

Never was a lad more sorely tempted than poor

Stephen. His own comrades, still in their teens, were swaggering about as recruits or coming home from sea with enticing yarns and prize money clinking in their pockets. Now and then Stephen found something to laugh at. A dozen boys and a retired boatswain with a wooden leg had sailed away in an open boat, armed with a few old muskets. The craft was dubbed *Black Death* and their intention was to " bag a Britisher." A line-of-battle ship of a blockading squadron had bagged *them* off Cape Ann. The boys were soundly spanked by a brawny master-at-arms and then set adrift without their muskets. A bantam of a British midshipman warned them that unless they steered straight for Salem harbor, the *Black Death* would be blown out of water.

Stephen endured his disappointment without whimpering until the staunch Derby ship *Aurora* was ready for sea. Trim she rode and loftily sparred, as handsome as a sloop-of-war. The rows of painted gunports ran from forecastle house to poop. A hundred and forty men were needed to handle and fight her, and a strapping lieutenant was mustering recruits. With a fifer and a drummer he passed along the narrow streets, pausing here and there when a crowd collected, and rolling out this oration:

" All true seamen and able-bodied landsmen who have a mind to distinguish themselves in the glorious cause of their country and make their fortunes, an opportunity

now offers on board the ship *Aurora.* Let them repair to the rendezvous at the sign of the Turk's Head where they will be kindly entertained and receive the greatest encouragement. The ship *Aurora,* in the opinion of every person who had seen her in her present trim, is one of the best cruisers in America. She will always be able to fight her guns under an excellent cover and no vessel yet built was ever calculated for sailing faster."

The audience required little persuasion to follow the lieutenant to the Turk's Head Tavern. Upon a table in the tap-room was a document ready to sign, and beside it an enormous bowl of rum punch to slake the thirst of the recruits. Stephen Claghorn hovered wistfully at the door and watched them flock in to sign their names and ladle out the punch. He heard the roaring toasts to a lucky cruise and confusion to all tyrants. The master gunner of the *Aurora* stood upon a table and led them in singing a chorus which ran:

"All you that have bad masters
And cannot get your due,
Come, come my brave boys
And join our ship's crew."

No urging was required to fill the berth deck of the *Aurora* with likely men. Most of them were seasoned sailors whose ships were laid up in idleness because of the British blockading squadrons. Stephen Claghorn edged closer to the table and greedily scanned the articles of

agreement as one recruit after another scrawled his name at the bottom. His eye caught such fascinating paragraphs as these:

The Officers and Seamen shall be entitled to one-half of all prizes captured by said Ship after the cost of condemning, etc., is deducted from the whole. . . .

The Officers and Seamen agree that they will to the utmost of their abilities discharge the duties of Officers and Seamen, according to their respective stations on board said Ship, her boats and prizes by her taken: and the Officers and Seamen further agree that if any Officer or Private shall in time of any engagement with any vessel abandon his post or disobey the commands of the Captain or any superior Officer, he shall, if adjudged guilty before the mast, forfeit all right to any prize or prizes by her taken. . . .

The Owners, Officers, and Seamen agree that if any one shall first discover a sail which shall prove to be a prize he shall be entitled to Five Hundred Dollars.

Any one who shall first board any vessel in time of an engagement, which shall prove a prize, shall be entitled to One Thousand Dollars and the best firelock on board said vessel, Officers' prizes being excepted.

If any Officer or Seaman shall at the time of an engagement lose a leg or an arm he shall be entitled to Four Thousand Dollars: if any Officer or Seaman shall lose an eye in time of an engagement he shall receive the sum of Two Thousand Dollars: if any Officer or Seaman shall lose a joint he shall be entitled to One Thousand Dollars, the same to be paid from the whole amount of prizes taken by said Ship. . . .

That if any person shall be found to be a ringleader of a meeting or cause any disturbance on board, refuse to obey the commands of the Captain or any Officer, or behave with cowardice or get drunk in time of action, he shall forfeit his or their share of prize money to the rest of the Ship's Company.

There was jostling and shouting in the tap-room of the Turk's Head Tavern, and a boisterous ovation when Joseph Whicher, in shirt-sleeves and brown apron, swaggered in from the distillery. Rough hands ripped open his shirt to bare the scar of the British bayonet as he pushed forward to take the pen in his fist and join the *Aurora's* crew. At sight of Stephen Claghorn he smote the lad an affectionate buffet and cried:

"Shipmate ahoy! Us two veterans sails and fights together as is proper. That crooked nose of yours is token of it. And a rare fright it'll give the Britishers to see us on the same deck, eh, what?"

Stephen sadly shook his head and retreated outside the tavern where it was quiet enough for talk. Joe Whicher followed, a mug in his hand, and demanded to know the reason.

"My mother will not consent, Joe, and she makes such an outcry if I but mention it ——"

"My missus sung the same tune, Steve, and she cracked my crown with a broom handle this very morning when I made up my mind to go privateerin' in the *Aurora*. But I mean to sign over my share in the cruise

for two hundred dollars cash in hand to Deacon Sprague. The money will tame the old woman's plaguy temper. It hurts me sore to lose the gamble on prizes, and maybe four thousand dollars for having a leg shot away, but a man'll pay the price for peace in the family."

"It will do me no good to assign my share in the cruise," sighed Stephen. "My mother has money enough, and owns shares in privateers besides. I'd best steer away from you and the tavern, Joe. It makes me waver. I am in the humor to run away to sea in this jolly *Aurora.*"

"Come along to the wharf then, Steve, and another look at her'll clinch it. Here's to a fair wind and bloody action for the pair of us wounded heroes."

Stephen suffered himself to be towed along by the arm. He was ripe for mutiny against his mother's tearful edicts. Near the wharf they chanced to meet the schoolmaster whose visage was longer and more solemn than usual. He, too, had been gazing at the shapely *Aurora* and was torn betwixt desire and duty.

"The fife and drum bewitched me," he confessed, "and I fled from that blandishing devil of a lieutenant. Whither bound, Stephen? And you, Joseph, you stout rascal. Enticing the lad? Twin terrors of the high seas? Is that the plot?"

"Make it three of us, Master Gerrish," cried Joe, "and fetch along the blunderbuss to serve as a bow-

chaser. If you hadn't foundered with it at North Bridge the redcoats would ha' been blown to flinders."

"Ah, I want to go, Joe. But what about my classes in the science of navigation? All my time is now given to this. These armed ships will need hundreds of officers. You have seen only the beginning of it. The war will be won or lost by sea as much as by land. Where one Salem privateer roams the Western Ocean, you will see a score of them next year. Already they are beating up the English Channel and the Irish Sea, within sight of the enemy's shores, and spreading havoc among the rich convoys."

"Your case is different from young Steve's," hoarsely exclaimed Joseph Whicher. "Ships has to be taught to find their way about, and you be a master hand at cipherin' it, as is well known, Master Gerrish. But how could we ever lick this per-perfidious old fathead of a King George if all the lusty lads was tied to their mother's apron strings, eh, what?"

"Softly, Joe," said the schoolmaster. "Every man must chart his own course and choose his own star."

Stephen's ardor to play the truant had suddenly cooled. The schoolmaster was a wiser friend than jovial Joseph Whicher who was seldom troubled by problems of conduct. Presently Stephen made an excuse to go home, away from temptation. All day he moped about the house. His mother was more distracted than ever and feared she had broken his spirit and he would go

into a decline. This was ridiculous because he was as plump and rosy as of yore.

Two days later they stood in the garden and watched the *Aurora* slide away from Derby Wharf with the topsails sheeted home. On deck and aloft swarmed her crew, a hundred and forty strong. They were singing in farewell:

"As I walked out one sunny morn
To view the meadows round,
I spied a pretty primrose lass
Come tripping o'er the ground,
Singing:
Blow ye winds in the morn-ing,
Blow, ye winds, Hi! Ho!
Brush away the morning dew,
Blow ye winds, Hi! Ho!"

Poor Stephen blubbered and found no more joy in life at all. As a dutiful son he had come to the end of his rope. There was a limit to human endurance. However, the darkest hour sometimes comes just before dawn. That same evening a brig let go anchor in the harbor and a boat's crew rowed ashore a dashing master mariner eager to pay his respects to the fair mistress of the Claghorn mansion. Fluttered, aglow with pleasure and surprise, was the widow when Captain Spencer Colt was announced. He had made a fast passage and was not expected so soon.

With easy assurance he kissed her hand and declared

that she was lovelier even than he had dreamed during his melancholy absence. Stephen displayed some slight interest in life when he heard the shipmaster say:

"No more trading voyages for my *Atlantic* brig! There was an obligation to bring this cargo of salt for the Continental army, but as soon as it can be discharged the vessel will be fitted as a privateer. Even this delay frets me. We met the *Aurora* standing out past Cape Ann to-day. An able ship but ——"

A shrug and a smile conveyed that the enemy would have much more to fear when Captain Colt's brig *Atlantic* should sweep the seas. Mistress Polly Claghorn was blind to the man's self-esteem and took him at his own appraisal. It was obvious that his handsome person and his fine airs and graces had quite turned her pretty head. Her observant son kept his thoughts to himself when she exclaimed, her eyes sparking with pride:

"I know how anxious you have been to command a fighting ship, Captain Colt. The risks and perils make me tremble, but the cause needs such gallant officers as you. Will you accept a set of colors, stitched with my own fingers?"

"They will be hoisted in battle and never hauled down so long as my vessel floats, dear lady."

Stephen coughed and choked on something. It was one of those loud "haw, haws" which he swallowed in time. On second thought, he felt a bit ashamed of him-

self. Was it fair to doubt the courage of Captain Spencer Colt, even though he had not been conspicuously in evidence at the North Bridge? He had a good ship and an honorable reputation in Salem commerce. Vanity was not a crime to besmirch a man. And now Captain Colt disarmed his youthful critic by exclaiming in warm tones:

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"I fancy you have been holding this fine lad back, Mistress Claghorn, to let him sail with me in the *Atlantic* brig. He is big enough, I trow, and has already shown his spirit against the British."

"His straight nose is utterly ruined, if that is what you mean," she replied. "Oh, I know not what to say, dear Captain Colt. The boy is wasting before my very eyes and almost hates his poor mother. I have steadfastly refused him, but to give him into your care seems another matter ——"

"Ah, these precious women, so sensitive, so tender," murmured the mariner, with a pensive smile. "But come now, if my advice is worth your notice, send the lad along with me this cruise and I will be a father to him."

"You would mighty like to be," Stephen murmured under his breath. He had pricked up his ears and was listening all agape. Here was deliverance unforeseen. Better to sail with Spencer Colt than not at all. Nobody else seemed to have as much influence with his mother. Stephen was mortally afraid that infatuation

would lead her to marry the man but meanwhile the sentimental affair might serve one good purpose.

" A word from you is like a command, Captain Colt," sighed Mistress Claghorn. " Is it my duty to let my son sail with you? "

" In the service of his country? Yes, indeed, ma'am. And it will make a two-fisted man of him. I will see to his promotion. And I swear to guard his safety with my own life."

" Give me time to ponder it," said she. " Perhaps I have been wrong. You will go to sea in a fortnight? "

" Sooner, Mistress Claghorn. Well, Stephen, you can leave me to handle this little affair. And my shrewd guess is that you will sign on in the *Atlantic.*"

Stephen went to bed soon after this but slept not a wink for hours. Before breakfast he was down to see the *Atlantic* warped into her berth. She was, indeed, a powerful vessel for privateering, with a great spread of canvas and a finely modeled hull, built to show her heels to the picaroons who plagued the routes of trade to the West Indies and the Spanish Main.

Captain Colt was not idle even while the cargo of salt was being hoisted out. Carpenters began to cut the ports for more guns and were bracing the deck beams. Blacksmiths were forging ironwork for the carriages. Riggers and sailmakers were told to work night and day.

Mistress Claghorn yielded to the persuasions of the

masterful Spencer Colt. Her manner was gentle and resigned. She was the patriot mother, accepting the ordeal of sacrifice. Stephen was very sorry for her but his laugh rang through the house again. Whenever his glance roved seaward, he grinned and stroked the bump on his nose. When, however, it came time to drum the recruits to the tavern rendezvous, he felt uneasy and not so elated. There were fewer prime, sober seamen than had hastened to join the *Aurora*. The crowd contained too many wastrels, broken men, flighty apprentices, who welcomed a chance to get tipsy. A first-class crew could not be sifted from such poor stuff as this.

Captain Colt and his first lieutenant exerted themselves to find better recruits among the other ships in port and were fairly successful, what with pocket money advanced and alluring speeches. Stephen Claghorn kept his suspicions to himself nor let fall a single word that might dismay his mother. But the fact that there was no rush of volunteers to the *Atlantic* brig persuaded him that his secret opinion of Captain Spencer Colt had not gone wide of the mark. Among mariners he was not reckoned to be of the calibre of a fighting privateer commander.

When, on sailing day, the crew was mustered aboard ship there was much disorder and noise but the stern discipline of the sea soon quelled it, and the boatswain's cruel cat-o'-nine-tails was ready to flog offenders as soon as the vessel should go clear of the land. Stephen Clag-

horn saw his mother waving to him from the garden. He blew her a farewell kiss.

Then he laughed in sheer delight, for along the wharf at a trot came the worthy schoolmaster, canvas bag on his shoulder, roughly dressed as a sailor, that serious countenance fairly beaming. As he swung his long legs over the bulwark, Stephen grabbed him and shouted:

" Sling your hammock next to mine, Ben Gerrish, old trump. Got the upper hand of duty, same as me, did you? "

" Well, I thought I had better look after you for your mother's sake, Steve," confessed the other. " And by luck I found a retired shipmaster in Boston, a man very competent in mathematics and the science of navigation, who has taken over my classes."

" Um-m-m, I seem to be ably taken care of," grinned the lad, pointing a thumb at Captain Spencer Colt upon the poop. " Make no silly excuses, Ben. You couldn't stand being tethered ashore any longer."

Soon the brig moved away from the weeping wives and doleful sweethearts on Derby Wharf. As she slipped out across the bar, the watches were set, the bewildered landsmen driven to their stations, and the gun crews picked from among the most reliable hands. At daybreak next morning the brig was well off the coast, running to the eastward with a whole-sail breeze and a fourth of her crew wretchedly seasick. From the foretop a lookout yelled down:

A Stout Lad Signs the Ship's Articles

" Sail ho! On the larboard bow! Ha, she puts up her helm to give us the slip."

" A strange sail," shouted Captain Spencer Colt, spy-glass at his eye. " All hands to make chase and clear ship for action. Lively, boys. More haste, more dollars."

His officers ran to give the orders. The crew was too much of an undrilled mob to obey with precision, but kicks and curses sorted them after a fashion. The gun tackles were manned and the lighter sails set aloft as the brig swept in pursuit. The schoolmaster felt far from well and detested the thought of breakfast. He knew more mathematics than seamanship. But he strapped on a cutlass and said to his young comrade:

" The old hands take yonder sail to be a prize that may give us a fight for it. Mayhap we have misjudged Captain Colt. He walks the deck as cool and intrepid as though he strolled in a Salem garden."

"A fine picture of the ready seaman," agreed Stephen. " I wish to goodness I felt as unterrified as he looks. This is no place for a fat boy who is apt to stop a round shot as soon as they begin to fly. My dear mother was a most sensible woman."

CHAPTER III

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE TOPSAIL SCHOONER

THE privateer brig, so soon out of port, was in no trim to fight a hard engagement. Many of the men had hazy notions of their duties and there had been no practice at the guns. But Captain Colt crowded on after the stranger, and his air of composure helped to steady the nerves of the greenhorns. He saw to it that the pikes and small-arms were ready in case he should have to lay the other vessel aboard and ordered grog served to all hands. With a strong breeze and a great press of sail, the *Atlantic* was seen to be gaining rapidly.

Ere long the stranger was disclosed to be a topsail schooner riding deep with cargo, her canvas patched and dingy. She wallowed clumsily in the crested seas. The frantic effort to escape pursuit was almost ludicrous. As the privateer swept closer, a few guns were visible on the rolling deck but no attempt was made to serve them. Half a dozen men stood gazing at the heavily armed Yankee brig whose open ports revealed a long row of muzzles wet with spray. The aspect of the helpless schooner was shabby and forlorn.

A red wisp of a British ensign fluttered at a gaff. A

ball of smoke puffed from the bow of the *Atlantic* and the solid shot splashed a little way beyond the schooner. Two of her men jumped to loose the head-sails while the others tailed on to the main-sheet or swung the foreyard. Presently they hove the vessel into the wind. The white-whiskered, round-shouldered skipper hauled down the rag of an ensign, his movements deliberate. Then he stumped to the rail, spat over the side, and shook his fist at the Yankee privateer.

Most of the Salem recruits were jubilant, pounding each other, cutting capers, shouting huzzas. A prize taken the first day out and nobody hurt! It meant money in their pockets. A good omen for the voyage! Captain Colt sent an armed boat away in charge of a boarding master with orders to put the crew under hatches and fetch the skipper with his papers.

Stephen Claghorn stood looking on from the waist of the brig where he had been stationed as a sail-trimmer. His boyish heart was stirred to sympathy for the trading schooner's plight. He could feel no bitter enmity against such foemen as these humble seafarers. The privateer's boat's crew climbed on board the prize and met with no resistance. Roughly they hustled the prisoners below decks.

The *Atlantic* rolled within pistol-shot and Captain Spencer Colt gazed with folded arms but raised no objection to the harsh treatment of the schooner's crew. Presently the venerable skipper was bundled into the

boat which returned to the brig. Awkwardly he clambered over the side and was taken aft under guard. Gnarled fingers twisting in his white beard, the seamed, kindly face worked with strong emotion. The privateer commander impatiently scanned the packet of documents and exclaimed:

"A Nova Scotia schooner, eh? From Digby to Jamaica with salt fish, shooks, and deals. Lumber and codfish. A sorry cargo but it will fetch something, and the vessel is worth putting up at public sale. Captain John Maltby, is it, you old rogue?"

"Miscall me no names, you bloody Yankee crimp," retorted the old man, his faded eyes ablaze. "Is it war to beggar a peaceful mariner like me that must go to sea to earn his bread? Had you been nearer my size and a match for my ship, I'd ha' fought and whipped you. Contrary winds set me close to your coast, blast the luck."

"No more insolence or I put you in irons," cried Spencer Colt, with an ugly scowl. "Better thank God I didn't knock that old bucket of a schooner into splinters with a broadside. How many able-bodied men in your crew? They may be glad to shift their allegiance and sign with me."

"Spoken like the dirty dog of a sea robber that you be," thundered Captain John Maltby, beside himself with grief and rage. "A poor crew it is, old men and boys, mostly kinfolk and neighbors of mine, but staunch

to the king and the flag. There was another Salem privateer that bespoke me yesterday and took out my four best men as prisoners which was fair enough in war and I made no rumpus. But they let the vessel go as too poor to bother with, with naught but dried fish to feed Jamaica niggers and staves for their molasses barrels. And me that has owned and sailed her these forty years."

"Take this windy old nuisance and throw him into his hold with his own crew," rasped Captain Colt as the boarding master stepped forward. "The schooner will be sent into Salem. Move along, now. This is a foolish waste of time."

Captain John Maltby was bound to have the last word. In tones of utter contempt, his head up, he shouted:

"I know *your* breed of sailorman, my fine sea dandy. You would sooner pilfer than fight, and the sight of a king's cruiser 'ud turn your stomach."

This gross insult was too much for Spencer Colt. His headstrong temper broke its bonds. With an oath he struck the old man across the mouth to silence him. Wiping a trickle of blood from a cut in his lip, Captain John Maltby trudged forward in the grip of the boarding master. A boat carried them over to the schooner and the prize crew made sail at once and laid a course for Salem harbor.

Stephen Claghorn had edged near enough to witness

the scene on the quarter-deck. He was hot with resentment and disgust. Sullenly he turned to his task and hauled on the main brace as the brig filled away to the eastward. His mates took it callously and swore it served the pestilent old scamp of a Britisher right. He had been told to belay his jaw-tackle and he kept on firing off one insult after another. Lucky for him his wicked old head wasn't knocked off!

Stephen found a friendly confidant when the schoolmaster came on deck, all dirt and perspiration and gasping for fresh air.

" Purser's clerk is not the billet of my choice," said he, " but I can expect no great favors from the bold Spencer Colt. Overhauling the stores, down among the pork and beef barrels, is not the gay life of a privateersman that my fancy painted."

" I like it no better, Ben, if this is a fair sample. To ruin a harmless grandsire of a shellback because he hails from Nova Scotia is naught to be proud of. And to hit him on the mouth because he stood up and spoke his mind like a brave man, white-haired and helpless though he was ——"

" Spencer Colt did that cowardly deed, Steve? In sight of the ship's company? "

"Aye, and is ashamed of it now, I'll wager. He fidgets and looks unhappy."

" For fear you will tell it in Salem," cannily observed Ben Gerrish.

" Perhaps," said Stephen, and a thought made him chuckle. " I shan't omit it if there comes a chance to send a letter home."

" There are some good men in this ship who will share your opinion, Steve. And they will be the slower to obey a master whom they fail to respect. Spencer Colt is more eager for dollars than glory, and we have begun to find it out. He may make a rich cruise of it, but 'tis not what you and I enlisted for."

" His behavior sticks in my craw, Ben, and I want no share of prize money from that wretched little schooner."

After all, it was a minor incident in the adventurous life of this roving brig, and soon forgotten by most of her people. They were small ships that sailed and fought a century and a half ago, and existence was hard and often cruel. Men were crowded and cooped between stifling decks which stank and were seldom dry, and the food was scanty and bad. A modern jail is far pleasanter than the seamen's quarters in an old-time privateer or man-of-war. But they usually suffered and dared with uncomplaining fortitude and took fortune as it came.

CHAPTER IV

CAPTAIN COLT ENGAGES THE ENEMY

DAY after day the *Atlantic* pursued her quest, out into mid-ocean, but not a solitary sail lifted above the blue horizon rim. There was no idleness on board. The raw recruits were hammered into shape by drill and discipline as inflexible as iron. Under the vigilant eye of Spencer Colt the officers endeavored to make the ship smart and efficient, in the spirit of the naval service. If men grumbled or slackened, the punishment was severe. As a seaman, Captain Colt knew his trade. Confidence in him increased, along with a feeling of pride in the ship. Stephen Claghorn discreetly kept his opinion to himself.

Pampered son though he had been at home, there was a manly strain in this plump and juicy youngster. He could endure the rigors of the sea without whining. The boatswain's mates might knock him about but his grin was as cheery as the rising sun and his white teeth gnawed the flinty biscuit and pickled meat with a splendid appetite. He could have eaten thrice as much as was doled out and therefore he lost weight until it was no more " Fatty " Claghorn. He had known ships and

their ways, even as an urchin ashore. This cruise was making him into an active, quick-witted young seaman, on deck or aloft.

It was lamentably otherwise with the lanky, serious-minded schoolmaster whose seafaring knowledge was all science and theory. Trigonometry had no terrors for him but he was horribly seasick whenever the wind blew, and he detested the language and manners of a privateer crew. As the ship's navigator he would have been invaluable but Spencer Colt was not the man to admit that Ben Gerrish knew more than he did, so kept him drudging as a most indifferent purser's clerk or storekeeper.

The wide ocean, in time of peace so populous with ships, seemed an empty waste of rolling water as the brig hauled to the southward to cross the trade routes between England and the West Indies. The weather turned hot, with spells of breathless calm when the pitch almost bubbled in the seams and the men fried in the sun. A month out of port and there had been never a slant of luck since the shabby Nova Scotia schooner had been taken.

Two or three old seamen, hairy and tattooed, who believed in mermaids and other marvels of the deep, were heard to say that the voyage could come to no good end. They had seen an evil spell cast upon more than one stout ship. Captain Colt had done wrong to strike a man whose beard was hoary with years. There was such a thing as mercy and respect for gray hairs even in deal-

ing with the enemy. It might well be that a deed like this could breed misfortune, as when a sailor slew an albatross.

Such gossip as this was carried to the ears of Captain Spencer Colt by some worthless petty officer anxious to curry favor, and he stopped it by ordering one of these mutineers, as he called them, to be tied up by the thumbs and given two dozen lashes across the bare back. This hard penalty increased the spirit of restless discontent among men who had sailed with dazzling visions of prize money. They were not dogs in a kennel to be cursed and whipped by a strutting martinet on the quarter-deck. Such was the temper of the brig as she sweltered in the languid airs or traversed the watery leagues to no purpose.

One night at dusk, the men off watch loitered in groups or leaned upon the bulwark to watch a round moon rise big and red from out a hazy sea. A small breeze stirred the tall spires of canvas and the vessel moved quietly, the foam whispering along her sides. The hearts of these turbulent wanderers were lulled and there were sounds of laughter and snatches of song and pleasant talk.

The great red disc of a moon had not yet rolled clear of the ocean rim when the deck of the privateer rang with shouts of sudden amazement. The peaceful scene was shattered in a twinkling.

Across the luminous face of the moon a ship was

slowly stealing, a wondrous picture in delicate silhouette. Black, distinct, the outline stood revealed like a model cunningly carved from ebony, the masts clothed with canvas up to the tiny royals, the hull as clearly etched.

Thus the image passed across the surface of the rising moon, like a phantom ship, and was gone from sight in the misty gloaming.

Swiftly the privateer trimmed her yards and altered her course to intercept the path of this other vessel so curiously descried. The breeze freshened after a little while and the deck heeled to the sighing pressure of it. The moon climbed out of the shimmering haze and flooded the sea with silver radiance. Darkness was banished. Keen eyes stared from the topmast shrouds of the *Atlantic* brig while below the elated seamen made ready for an engagement.

They moved to and fro without confusion, a crew that had learned its business after weeks of incessant schooling. Forgotten were the grievances and privations. The evening wore on until, dim and distant, like a bit of dark cloud, they perceived the ship which they hoped to make their prey. She must have been able to get sight of the brig at the same time but there was no indication of seeking flight. Steadily this other shadowy vessel followed its own track over the shining surface of the sea.

The privateer prepared for action. Battle lanterns were hung between decks, powder charges passed up

from the magazine, fire buckets filled and the canvas hose laid to the pump. Captain Spencer Colt was given a round of cheers when he stepped to the break of the poop to tell his men that he hoped to engage an enemy ship. In such an event he would expect them to fight as long as two planks held together. Lithe and graceful he was, with the moonlight glinting on his sword and the gilt shoulder-straps.

Stephen Claghorn's station had been shifted to the quarter-deck where his duty was to stand by the sheet of the spanker or steering sail, and use a musket at close quarters. Captain Colt laid down his spy-glass to say in cordial tones:

" I have not forgotten my promise, Stephen, my lad, to keep you in sight if it comes to warm work. You will stay aft with me, an exposed position, but I know your mettle. You would not remain under cover if I sent you to a safer place."

" Thank you kindly, sir," demurely replied the young seaman, " but you may have your hands full without playing the good uncle to me. Yonder ship has the cut of a sloop-of-war, the old sailors tell me, and she shows no signs of edging off to dodge us."

Captain Colt turned to gaze long at the spectral craft which was sailing with the wind abeam. Her gun-ports were little squares of light, and there were many of them. No timid merchant trader would behave in this fashion, with the breeze favoring a stern chase and the pos-

sibility of a cloudy night in which to hide away. There was no more guesswork when the stranger braced her yards and hauled on the wind to cross the course of the Yankee privateer. It was a hostile manœuvre. The challenge was unmistakable.

"He shifts his helm to gain the weather gage," muttered a stolid quartermaster of the *Atlantic*. "It'll be a pretty bout at seamanship afore we burn much powder."

Captain Spencer Colt took a nervous stride or two, seemed to hesitate, and his voice betrayed excitement as he told the sailing-master to furl and secure the lighter sails. It was his intention to hold the brig to windward, if possible. Soon she changed direction so that the two vessels were moving on similar courses but not quite parallel. Their paths slowly converged. They were drawing closer together because the British ship had the better of it by a point or two at working into the wind. It was uncanny to see her slip along like a ghost.

In this manner they sailed until the distance between them was less than half a mile when a quartermaster broke the tense silence of the brig's quarter-deck by growling to his mate at the helm:

"No clumsy king's ship, that! Her tall spars misled us, Jack. That low hull with the sweet sheer was ne'er moulded in a Navy dockyard. A Liverpool slaver she was and they fitted her as a privateer. I used to see 'em layin' in the Sierra Leone River, on the Gold

Coast, when I was in the slave trade out o' Rhode Island ports."

"Like enough," said the other quartermaster. "If this one fights as nimble as she sails, your wife'll be a widow."

With an explosive oath, Captain Colt bade them hold their tongues. He was pacing to and fro, now glancing aloft, again frowning at the hostile vessel which was bathed in the serene and brilliant beauty of the night. Here and there in the brig, men talked in low tones or passed some order along. Sparks glowed where the gunners held the lighted matches ready for the word to fire. A cutlass clinked. A bulkhead door slammed. A sheet-block rattled when the wind spilled from an arching sail. These small sounds seemed very loud.

It surprised Stephen Claghorn that he felt so little sense of fear. There was a lump in his throat and he breathed as fast as though he had been running a foot-race but he would not have been elsewhere for worlds. This was not his first engagement with the Britishers. His damaged nose was a souvenir to prove it. He forgot himself in his intent scrutiny of Captain Spencer Colt while he endeavored to fathom the mind of that showy mariner. Was the poor opinion of his courage an error? It began to look that way.

But young Stephen's doubts could not be wholly dispelled. Even though the brig was sailing straight into a desperate action, did Captain Colt really desire it?

THE OLD HANDS OF THE ATLANTIC YELPED WITH DELIGHT

He had made after this other vessel, as a possible prize, and now he had caught a Tartar. Nor could he turn tail and run for it without disgracing himself in the sight of his crew. They were anxious for battle. The odds were fair enough, as they regarded them, and they seemed indifferent to the fact that the stake might be death and glory instead of dollars and pence.

" Spencer Colt mops his face although the night is cool," said Stephen to himself, " and a man is sore unhappy when he chews his lip like that. This Liverpool privateer is a tough nut to crack and he knows it."

Crash! Bang! Boom-m-m!

Stephen clapped his hands to his ears as the deck trembled beneath him. The starboard side of the *Atlantic* brig spouted flame, and the gray smoke curled in lazy clouds. The deck awoke to furious activity as the seamen, naked to the waist, plied hand-spike and sponge-stave and rammer to reload for another broadside while the powder boys scampered like monkeys. Several shot flew high and passed through the enemy's lower sails. The ragged holes were visible against the moonlit sky. She held her own fire until the vessels were a few hundred feet apart, and then it was a thunderous duel, hammer-and-tongs, with presently a lull to let the veiling smoke blow clear.

With a racket so infernal, Stephen Claghorn expected to behold the enemy in a sinking condition and wondered how the brig still floated. But no great damage had

been inflicted. Four Yankee sailors were wounded, another killed by a falling spar, and the decks were cluttered with smashed woodwork and tangled ropes. But the riggers were racing aloft to reeve new halliards and braces, and a carpenter's mate dangled over the side to plug the shot-holes with stoppers of oakum and canvas.

The night wind had become fitful and was fast dying. It thwarted the plan of the Liverpool ship to pass across the brig's bows and put her to a disadvantage in the leeward position. They were approaching each other all the while. It became evident that unless one or the other should give way, they would soon be in collision or very near it. The old hands of the *Atlantic* yelped with delight. They had no joy in playing this game at long range but preferred two ships locked together and the clash of cutlass and pike.

From the quarter-deck, however, there came no command to muster the boarding party nor did Captain Spencer Colt leap into the waist to lead his men over the bulwark. It was cruel work with the broadsides now, nor could a gun captain miss the mark. Drifting side by side, they pounded each other and the balls thudded into the oaken planking or tore the sails to ribbons.

A quartermaster gave a great cry of agony and dropped in his own blood. With a defiant cheer another man sprang to take his place but Captain Colt, his fine uniform spattered, flinched and turned away.

Captain Colt Engages the Enemy

As a sail-trimmer, Stephen's task was ended when the boom was shot in two. He jumped to the roof of the cabin house to blaze away with his musket. Looking down at the deck below, he saw smashed gun-carriages, men strewn about, and the flicker of fire in an open hatch. There was a dearth of hands to fight this dread peril of a burning ship and Stephen ran to help man the brakes of the pump.

Amid the noise and the stench of blood and powder, he found his comrade, the schoolmaster, all tattered and begrimed, one hand mashed by a grape-shot but still anxious to do his part.

"Ahoy, Steve," he shouted. "Thank God you are still alive. We're giving the other fellow as good as he sends. Independence forever and no surrender!"

"The North Bridge was nothing like this, Ben. Can you pass fire buckets with your one hand?"

"Easy enough. We can douse it, never fear. These men are grand, Steve. By the eternal, they stand the gaff."

The schoolmaster's proud elation was suddenly blasted. He gazed aft and then over the ship's side with a bewildered air. His arm was flung out in a tragic gesture of sorrow and dismay. The battered Yankee privateer, instead of closing with the enemy, was slowly sheering off and increasing the distance between them. The breeze had veered a little and a stronger slant of it enabled Captain Colt to avoid closer quarters.

His tactics were disclosed when the sailing-master trumpeted: "All hands to tack ship! Lay aloft, ye lubbers, and haul and belay."

Even then the crew failed to comprehend the commander's purpose. They took it for granted that he was employing shrewder seamanship to win some advantage, or he had decided to stand off and make repairs before finishing the engagement. Sluggishly the brig bore into the wind and it was hard persuading her, with the main-topmast shattered and the sails as full of holes as a colander.

The lion-hearted schoolmaster, all aquiver with pain and fatigue, threw an arm across the shoulder of his boyish friend and brokenly exclaimed:

" You know, and I know, Steve. This Spencer Colt shakes himself clear and runs for it, like a cur that feels the fangs. His ship is not too crippled to come to grips."

" Wait a bit, Ben," returned the lad, hoping against hope. " My notion of him is the same as yours, but can he be such a coward as this, to break like a rotten stick? "

" Aye, he will wear ship presently and make a running fight for it, and trust to his heels."

CHAPTER V

"PIRATES, THAT'S WHAT YOU BE!"

IT turned out as the schoolmaster had foreseen. The Yankee brig soon eased her helm and the light air fanned her along in a leisurely half circle so that she moved out of range of the enemy privateer. The gunners welcomed the respite and sprawled panting on deck or sluiced their bodies with salt water. Wisps of vapor curled from the hatches and brought the smell of smouldering timbers but the fires were under control and the powder magazine was safe.

Wounded men were borne into the cockpit where the surgeon and his mates looked like butchers, shirts all stained and sleeves rolled up.

The ship was still fit to fight. No more than twenty men were down. There were fifty-odd survivors to handle sail and serve the guns. They were confident that the enemy had suffered as severely. A brief interlude and then the drummer would beat them to quarters again and Captain Colt would rake the stubborn Britisher. Such was the belief of his crew. The few skulkers had been dragged out of holes and corners and cuffed into doing their duty. The spirit of the ship

was unbroken. The baptism of fire had exalted it. These were patriots and Americans.

The enemy appeared to be unwilling to call it a drawn battle. Riddled and leaking though she was, the British privateer started her sheets and turned to run before the wind and so follow the course of her Yankee adversary. For some time these manœuvres separated them by a wide interval of water. Instead of trying to decrease the distance, Captain Colt was holding straight on with all the spare canvas that could be hastily bent. There was no sign that he intended to haul up for another encounter or to seek to outwit the enemy by means of adroit seamanship.

In strong winds and a lively sea the *Atlantic* might have slipped away from pursuit but with this breeze that breathed so gently the old slave trader, with her sharp hull and huge spread of sail, had the better of it. Nearer and nearer they floated until again these shadowy ships were firing steadily while a fog of smoke half-obscured them.

Now the American seamen realized that Captain Colt was, in truth, running away from an antagonist whom they believed they could whip. He had evaded the opportunity of forcing the issue at close quarters, yard-arm to yard-arm, with the grappling irons holding the two ships together. And now he was in open flight. The white heat of devoted and reckless courage, which had made these men indifferent to wounds and death,

began to cool. They toiled at the guns, but with an ebbing ardor, and the rough jests and the cheery shouts subsided. Uneasily they glanced at the quarter-deck or paused to growl at one another.

And all the while the British privateer was creeping closer. There was no escaping her destructive broadsides. A chain-shot whizzed through the brig's main shrouds and cut down the first lieutenant. A flight of canister spattered the gun-deck and slew two of the men who swayed at the tackles of a twelve pounder. A round shot tore huge splinters from the foremast which cracked and groaned as if about to tumble over the side.

And still the enemy ship crept nearer. Her cannon were the more deadly because the American gunners had become slower and less careful. The cowardice of the commander had disheartened them.

It was still possible to save the situation by one bold stroke. Unable to escape in a running fight, Captain Spencer Colt might have turned like a wolf at bay and won high honor for himself and his ship, even in defeat. But his was not the soul of a hero and it could not stand the test. His ship staggered at the impact of another infernal broadside. The men came running aft to implore him, for the love of God, to give them a chance to fight before she was pounded to pieces.

With cocked pistols he drove them from the poop. His face was white and contorted in the light of the

moon. Like an automaton, as if something else than his own volition urged him, he walked to the rail. He flung a coil of line from a belaying pin. With his own hands he began to haul down the flag which had so proudly streamed aloft.

Stupefied, the surviving Yankee seamen beheld their brig strike her colors to the foe. It was as though some melancholy blight had descended upon the ship, making those who had so valiantly defended her feel incapable of thought or motion. They stood at their stations in sullen dejection, staring at the victorious enemy. Then an old sailor, a rammer in his fist, laughed a bitter laugh as he cried out:

" A dunghill rooster on the quarter-deck, mates, and we thought he was a game-cock! Prize money, my eye! You'll rot in a British prison, that's what."

It so happened that Stephen Claghorn had run aft on an errand just when the flag slid drooping to the deck. For the moment he believed it had been shot away and would quickly be hauled aloft again. In fact, he leaped to snatch up the flag and mount the rigging with it. But a word from Captain Colt halted him in his tracks. Then he noted the hanging head, the listless posture, and knew that the commander of the *Atlantic* had given up the ship. The son of Mistress Polly Claghorn dug his knuckles in his eyes and wept with rage and chagrin. In quavering accents he exclaimed:

" The colors my mother stitched, and you swore to fly

them as long as your vessel floated! Big words are cheap You were always that kind, Captain Colt, and I guessed it, but *she* wouldn't have listened to me. By thunder, she'll take my word for it now, and you can chew on that."

There was no reply. The insult seemed to pass unheard. Deserted by his officers, Captain Spencer Colt waited alone while the British privateer silenced her own fire. A wild clamor of cheering rang along her devastated decks. So quiet was the sea that instead of launching boats the two ships were permitted to drift toward each other until hawsers were passed and they lay lashed together, bow and stern.

The crew of the captured brig forsook their stations and huddled in the waist. Misery loves company. They were a tattered company of scarecrows, most of them marked with burns or cuts or scratches.

Over the side poured the British privateersmen, alert against surprise but with no great show of hostility. The surrender was unexpected. Their verdict was that the Americans had fought hard and well. The sulky prisoners were bombarded with questions. Had they run short of powder? Were the men mutinous? A little more of it and the *Saucy Jack* of Liverpool would have had all she could stomach. The victors had been thankful to quit. This made the Americans no happier and with one accord they damned their craven captain.

The American wounded were hastily transferred in

care of their own surgeon. The able-bodied were permitted to get spare clothing and were then driven aboard the *Saucy Jack* and penned below. The brig was too seriously damaged to be manned as a prize, and there was no cargo to be taken out. Therefore the captors set fire to her and she made a huge and mournful conflagration.

The weary prisoners stretched themselves upon the hard planks and slept like dead men nor fretted about the morrow. Captain Spencer Colt had demanded that he be given separate quarters aft, as befitted his rank, but the British skipper was a rough man with bad manners who had small respect for a handsome uniform. He had no love for Yankee rebels and he intended to show them few favors.

By the feeble light of a swaying lantern, the wretched seamen aroused themselves the next morning. A hatch had been opened to give them a little air but their damp kennel reeked of the bilges. Mouldy hard-bread and water was the breakfast fare, and grateful they were to get it. A youthful sentry took a fancy to Stephen Claghorn's rosy visage and chatted with him through the hatch. The *Saucy Jack* was homeward bound to England, he imparted, and would send the Americans ashore at Plymouth to be confined in Old Mill Prison where they were likely to stay a long while.

"Won't they exchange us for British seamen taken by our armed ships?" asked Stephen.

"No chance, you rascally traitor," amiably answered the sentry. "You lads are pirates, that's what you be, and by law should be strung up to dry in the sun. Your flag and your privateerin' commissions are all rubbish."

"Drop that musket and I'll punch your head, you dirty Tory," cried Stephen. "Your redcoats found it a real war at Bunker Hill. And we were no pirates that fought you last night but free men in arms against hateful oppression."

"You are English, same as us," argued the sentry. "It's a family row, by jiggers. All this gammon about a free nation is downright silly. Blessed if I know what it's all about."

"Here you two, stow the gab," bawled the officer of the deck. "Fetch the prisoners in squads of a dozen to pump the ship and clear the decks."

It was a blessed boon to breathe the pure air and move about. The *Saucy Jack* rolled deep, with so much water in her hold, and the sea splashed into her shattered gun-ports. Her own crew was short-handed, having sent men away in several prizes. It behooved the American seamen to labor and so help to save their own lives.

The English captain was a broad and burly man and most careless of his dignity. He wore a tar-stained shirt, flapping canvas breeches, a torn straw hat, and grass slippers. Much of the time he swung his legs from the cabin roof and sipped rum and water. The

slave trade had known him in other years. However, he was not an unfeeling brute. The schoolmaster was in a squad on deck, feeling very sick and shaky, with a rag tied around his injured hand. The master of the *Saucy Jack* came lurching along and paused to exclaim, in a terrifying voice:

"Ah, ha, you dismal scoundrel. What ails your hand? Let me see it. A nasty hurt! Do you want it to fester and give old Saw-bones the fun of hacking it off? Tell him to cleanse it again and tuck you in with the other wounded."

This deprived Stephen Claghorn of the companionship of the friend he liked best of all. They were oddly mated—Ben Gerrish a man past thirty years old who had little mirth in him and had often been mistaken for a Puritan parson. But he had what youth admires wherever found, a loyal heart and a kindly spirit and a grit that no odds could daunt. To be separated for a few days of this unhappy voyage made Stephen feel very lonely and helpless. Privateering had ceased to be a romantic adventure. All he could look forward to was the intolerable condition of a prisoner-of-war in a strange and hostile land.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAY WALLS OF OLD MILL PRISON

DAY by day they made the *Saucy Jack* more seaworthy and sent new spars aloft and spread stout canvas on them until she was once more a fabric of rare grace and beauty driven fast by the strong westerly winds. Until she had met the Yankee brig, it had been a fortunate cruise, fat merchantmen captured with little fighting. The English sailors were therefore in good humor, and although the captives were half-starved and kept in a filthy hole, they were not wantonly abused.

And so these unfortunates were carried into Plymouth harbor and hustled ashore by a guard of Royal Marines sent off from the Devonport dockyard. Not all the people jeered them as they trudged through the streets to the justices' court to be committed to prison. There were those who felt sympathy with the American cause and dared to express it to these forlorn seamen. The opinion of England was divided. Stephen beamed his thanks when a middle-aged woman patted his cheek as he brushed past her, and he heard her murmur:

"Oh, the poor, dear laddie boy! And I have two at home just like him."

They were marched before two austere gentlemen in wigs and gowns who eyed them with sour disfavor and rapidly read aloud the documents in the case. In spite of his low spirits it gave Stephen a sense of importance to be accused of Piracy, Treason and Rebellion against His Majesty on the high seas. Certainly the boys of Salem who had called him "Fatty" Claghorn would have been much impressed could they have heard him sentenced to prison in this resounding, double-shotted language:

For as much as appears unto James Young and Ralph Mitchell, two of the Justices of our Lord the King, assigned to keep the Peace within the said county of Devon, on the examination of Stephen Claghorn, mariner, late of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay in North America, a prisoner brought before us, charged with being in Arms and Rebellion on the High Seas on board the *Atlantic* brig, American privateer so-called, sailed out of Salem in North America and commissioned by the North American Congress, which was taken by the *Saucy Jack,* English privateer;

That the said Stephen Claghorn was taken at sea in the High Treason act committed on the High Seas out of the Realm, on the 29th day of September last, being then and there found in arms levying War, in Rebellion and aiding the King's Enemies, and was landed at Plymouth in the County of Devon, and the said Stephen Claghorn now brought before us in this Parish, charged with and to be committed for the said offense to the Old Mill Prison in the Borough of Plymouth.

"If I could have rammed that into a twelve-pounder and fired it at the *Saucy Jack,*" Stephen whispered to the schoolmaster, "we might have blown her sky high."

"Hush, no levity," cautioned the other. "It sounds much to me like hopping out of the frying-pan into the fire. This first taste of merry England puts me in the doleful dumps."

"Never you mind, Ben, so long as these ugly bigwigs don't ask me where I got the crook in my nose. This is no place to mention Salem North Bridge."

Their hearts sank into their boots at sight of the gray stone wall surrounding the grim buildings of the military prison. An iron gate eight feet high opened to admit them. Red-coated sentries guarded it. They next passed through another gateway of an inner wall which appeared no less formidable. These two barriers enclosed a large open court in the centre of which was the massive prison house with slits of windows heavily barred. To these American derelicts of war it seemed, indeed, that all hope had been left behind.

In the yard scores of ragged men were strolling about or loafing in idleness. Most of them were luckless American seamen who flocked to welcome the new arrivals and to make acquaintance or renew past friendships afloat. In this early period of the Revolution, France and Spain had not yet joined cause with the Colonists against England. Later the Old Mill Prison

was to be crowded with sailors of divers tongues and races.

It was pitiful to behold these Yankee seafarers, men so bold and restless and energetic, condemned to inaction within these gray walls, perhaps for years. Already their demeanor had become listless. The tanned cheeks were bleaching into shades of sickly pallor. These first impressions were so dismal that Stephen Claghorn felt his spirits wilt, high-hearted though he had been amidst the perils of the sea. To the schoolmaster he said, with a troubled sigh:

"Do you think we shall ever see home again, Ben? This is so much like being buried alive that I can find no comfort in it."

"Better a live prisoner than a dead hero," stoutly replied Ben Gerrish, the philosopher. "I shall compose me no epitaph until we have learned more about this unpleasant place. We are in excellent company, barring the coarse louts with bayonets who stand guard over us."

It was a miserable condition of life but not quite so black as fancy had painted it. The prisoners were locked in the cell-rooms only for the night. From eight in the morning until sunset they were granted the freedom of the open courtyard where the air was fresh and sweet and there was space for exercise. And a man could live and keep his strength on the daily ration of bread and meat, beer, cheese, and dried peas. It was

little worse than the fare of the British naval service or in American armed ships. This afforded some slight consolation to Stephen Claghorn who had expected slow famine to reduce him to skin and bone. He would never get really enough to eat until he could again ransack his mother's pantry between meals.

During the first weeks of imprisonment there was diversion in swapping yarns or talking of home with the hapless sailors from Boston and Portsmouth and Salem who had been taken in privateers or merchant vessels. But the long nights in the canvas hammocks were apt to be sad and sleepless for these exiles. The monotonous futility of it bit into their souls like acid. Time dragged like eternity. The one consuming topic was of release or escape, but a swarm of sentinels watched the tall iron gates and those double walls or mingled with the prisoners in the court.

There was no eluding such vigilance as this, reflected Stephen. He felt like an animal in a cage. The schoolmaster, however, was discovering certain matters of interest. Beneath the surface this listless prison yard fairly boiled with plots and stratagems. What was more astonishing, the odds against escape were by no means hopeless. The thing had been done, more than once. Therefore it could be done again, in the opinion of these resourceful Yankee seamen. It meant matching wit against stupidity, playing a hazardous game that was immensely worth while.

Among the schoolmaster's new friends were several officers of American ships who had spent some time in this Old Mill Prison. Men of kindred spirit, they had been drawn together by unusual qualities of leadership and daring. This group had found much to admire in the dependable character of unassuming Benjamin Gerrish and they took him into their confidence. He insisted that they include his young shipmate, Stephen Claghorn. This was readily agreed to.

" If one scheme fails, they will try another, Steve," explained the loyal schoolmaster. " Other men have succeeded, as many as a dozen in the last three months."

" They must take wing and fly like birds, Ben. But I like your devilish hardihood. Never did I see a man improve so fast. You will be a desperate villain yet, with a price on your head."

" I hope so," said this shameless pedagogue. " Salem was too cramped a field for my talents, I verily believe."

Just then a tumult uprose in the prison yard. The prisoners were cheering. The angry sentries bawled curses and ran about with clubbed muskets. Two of them were dragging from the inner gate a tall fellow in a British private's uniform. He was recognized as the master of a small privateer out of Baltimore. Having bribed a friendly soldier to give him the clothes, he had followed the prison doctor to the gate, claiming to be his orderly. He had gone almost clear of the last

sentry box when his face was seen to be familiar. He took his capture in good humor and waved farewells as he was thrust into the " Black Hole " to stay a fortnight on bread and water.

This episode afforded Stephen Claghorn a glimpse of the secret undercurrents. It did not seem so wildly impossible to stake Yankee shrewdness against stone walls and bayonets. Two or three days later the schoolmaster told him to go to a corner of the wall, at the western side of the yard. This was a favorite lounging place for the prisoners. On this afternoon some of them were whittling ship models and trinkets to sell to visitors. Others were holding a hilarious mock-trial.

Their real intent was to screen the labor of the group of officers who had begun to pry out the rough stones in the endeavor to dig a hole through the wall. Such dirt and mortar as they had to remove could be put into bread bags and hidden under a rubbish heap in the corner of the wall. The audacity of the thing was in its favor. The sentries were not likely to suspect an attempt of this kind in broad daylight.

It was tedious work. Only a little could be done each day and every loosened stone had to be carefully replaced. Once through this inner wall, the conspirators hoped either to scale the outer wall by night or to steal out through a gate used by the soldiers in barracks. The rest of the prisoners were loyally willing to aid them as far as possible. It was a fine display of comradeship.

Those who were clever enough to plot a way of escape were entitled to the coöperation of the others.

One ingenious scheme after another was invented to decoy the thick-witted sentries away from this corner of the yard. Time hung heavy on their hands and they were easily amused. They were brutal when their officers ordered it but if left to themselves they found diversion among the Yankee prisoners who put new ideas into their heads and told them what the war was about.

So rosy and merry and harmless a lad as Stephen Claghorn was not apt to be suspected of joining one of the prison plots. For this reason he was assigned to keep a sharp watch on the sentries and coax them elsewhere while his friends took turns in picking and digging the stones with bits of iron. It might be a furious wrestling match that drew away two or three idling soldiers who were eager to wager their coppers and sixpenny bits on the result. This sport was so popular that poor Stephen was compelled to wrestle men much bigger and stronger than himself. He was stood upon his head and banged about until he protested to the schoolmaster:

"My faith, Ben, they will wear me out before you ever burrow through that stone wall. The favorite sport is to wallop me, and I dare not refuse a challenge."

"'Twill make a two-fisted man of you, Steve," grinned Ben Gerrish, "the same as Captain Spencer

Colt told your mother. When next you go hunting in the forest at home, you can capture the bears with your hands and squeeze them to death."

While his bruises were healing, Stephen devised foot-races and boxing bouts among the cabin boys and other urchins who had been taken in American crews. And when his wits were at a loss, the schoolmaster came to the rescue. He was teaching these boys to read and write and it was odd to see a hulking British sentry tip-toe up to peer over their shoulders and try to spell out the letters. More than one of them offered to pay for lessons while off duty.

Ben Gerrish could always collect a crowd, when other resources failed, by mounting a box and spouting an oration against kings and tyrants. At the top of his voice he would demand a cheer for the Thirteen States and the Continental Congress. At this, the indignant sentries would knock him off the box, slap his face, and threaten to throw him into the Black Hole.

Various tricks like these and the best of luck enabled the group of plotters to break through the wall after a fortnight of anxious and secret toil. They faced the opening with stones, most carefully relaid, and partly covered them with refuse from the cook-house. In the group were six men, besides Stephen and Ben Gerrish. It was decided to make the attempt together, on the same night.

The hope of freedom, slender and desperate though

it was, made Stephen feel profoundly sorry for those who were to be left behind. While in this pensive mood he happened to espy the late commander of the *Atlantic* brig. Captain Spencer Colt's handsome uniform was all tarnished and spotted and torn. His chin needed a razor. In body and soul he was a man who had crumbled. Few were the traces left of the alert, domineering sea dandy. He was not a man to stand unshaken in adversity.

His shipmates were at no pains to hide their contempt for him. It was no disgrace to have lost a ship in action. This misfortune had happened to other master mariners among the captives in the Old Mill Prison, but the feeling was that Spencer Colt might have saved both his ship and his honor. He was adjudged to be a man with a vital flaw.

Aware of the plan to attempt an escape, he made as if to cross the yard and bid farewell to Stephen Claghorn. He hesitated, however, and turned away. It was easy for Stephen to read his troubled thoughts. What message had Spencer Colt to send to his friends in Salem? What word of cheer and greeting to Mistress Polly Claghorn waiting for tidings in the brick mansion by the waterside?

"The less said, the better," reflected Stephen. "As a guardian I can't see that Spencer Colt has advanced my fortunes very much. Poor fool! There is one stepfather I am rid of."

There was always some delay in driving the prisoners into the buildings when the sunset gun boomed the signal. In this autumn weather the yard was quite dark before they were all inside. This made it possible to hide in the yard for a little spell without discovery by the sentries on their rounds. In fact, a few men might not be missed until the sergeants had passed through the rooms to call the roll and make certain that every prisoner was accounted for. After this tour of inspection, the doors were bolted for the night.

When the report of the sunset gun was heard on this momentous evening, Ben Gerrish and young Stephen purposely lagged behind the crowd which slowly converged toward the prison doorways. Watching the chance, they skulked in the shadows until a refuge was found between the cook-house and the hospital shed. Their six companions, by two and two, had been stealing, in the same manner, to other unfrequented areas of the yard.

Presently the schoolmaster and his chum flitted in the direction of the corner of the western wall. There they threw themselves flat upon the ground in a dusky angle of the enclosure. It was trying beyond words to have to wait and watch and listen, but the fading light still lingered to postpone the great adventure.

CHAPTER VII

THE SERGEANT CALLS THE ROLL

THE shadows deepened and the yard of the Old Mill Prison grew quiet. The stragglers had been herded inside. The heavy doors were closed upon all those sorrowful seamen who endured the hard fortunes of war. Unobserved in a nook of a walled enclosure, Ben Gerrish and Stephen heard a drummer turn the sergeants out for roll call. The night was cloudy. A weeping English drizzle began to fall. A sentry passed these two fugitives no more than a dozen feet away.

They counted the precious moments. The sounds of a scuffle and a cry for help alarmed them. The noise came from another quarter of the yard. It was bad news.

" Comrades of our party in trouble," whispered Ben. " Two of them planned to hide over yonder. They have been caught. Follow me, Steve, and waste not a second. The fat is in the fire."

They moved along, close to the wall, and flung themselves upon hands and knees. Frantically they tugged at the loosened stones yet used prodigious caution when they piled them to one side, lest they attract notice.

Fear was at their heels and gave them the strength and dexterity of ten men. Soon a draught of cold air brushed their sweating faces. It drew through the ragged gap in the masonry. More exertion and they dislodged all the remaining stones which were not imbedded in mortar. They had cleared the road to freedom.

" In you go, Steve, while I shove," muttered the chivalrous Master Gerrish. " 'Tis a small opening and you are broad in the beam."

" Age before beauty, Ben," was the courteous objection. " Then you can haul me through from the other side. Mother taught me to give place to my elders ——"

" Shut your mouth, you big ninny," fiercely chided the schoolmaster.

Stephen was peering into the hole when he felt himself violently rammed from behind. Head foremost he was shoved into the jagged opening. Unable to continue the argument, he squirmed forward with a series of grunts while Ben Gerrish pushed him by the feet. The wall was thick. Sharp stones projected to hamper the difficult progress. Although hardships and short rations had lessened the bulk of Stephen Claghorn, he was still an uncommonly stout specimen of a growing boy.

After enormous effort his head emerged from the outer side of the wall but there he stuck hard and fast.

Those beefy shoulders and that barrel-shaped chest were wedged like a cork in a bottle. Fragments of rock which had not been chipped off did the mischief. Poor Stephen could not believe the hideous truth, that liberty was so near and yet so far. He strained and he struggled the harder. Nor could he say a word to the perplexed Ben Gerrish who still strove, with might and main, to aid him from the rear. It was like trying to drive a sponge-staff into the bore of a cannon too small for it.

" Something is very wrong. He doesn't seem to go ahead," the distracted schoolmaster said to himself as he paused for breath. A tap on the shoulder made him jump with a frightened air. A cautious word in his ear reassured him. He looked up to recognize two other plotters of the group who were most nervously waiting their turn to crawl through the wall.

" 'Tis the chubby Claghorn lad. He has plugged the hole," explained the agitated Benjamin Gerrish as he wiped his dripping countenance.

" The devil you say! What's to be done? If we only had an oaken rammer ——"

" It can't be done," insisted the schoolmaster. " He should have been whittled down before I put him in there. Lay hold of his legs and haul him back with a heave all together. And be precious quick about it."

In silence they tugged while the victim stifled his groans. It seemed as if he could be extracted with

nothing else than a corkscrew. If he had not been very firmly put together, he would have been minus a leg or two, with such hearty good-will did these impatient sailormen lay hold. At length he seemed to give way all at once. Out of the hole he came, plop, and all hands tumbled in a heap.

"The blamed hole is too small," gasped Stephen as he rubbed his skinned shoulders.

"This young sundowner is too blamed big," sputtered one of the others. "After you, Master Gerrish, and lively, please, for the Lord's sake."

"No thank you, gentlemen. I shall stay in the yard. The lad and I are partners, for better or worse."

"Don't be a crazy fool, Ben," implored Stephen. "Snatch the chance and leave me behind. You can go through that hole like an eel."

During this amiable squabble the two waiting mariners sensibly decided to follow each other through the hole in the wall. They vanished without hitch or hindrance. Stephen was still urging and protesting but Ben Gerrish whacked him on the head and said:

"Stop that silly noise. Obey orders. The goose is cooked, so we must beat a swift retreat."

They ran at furious speed in the direction of the prison building. Stephen was in a fuddled state of mind. In such a pinch as this, however, he felt confidence in the schoolmaster as a cool and sagacious leader. Not much time had been spent in their unlucky

escapade at the wall. Ben Gerrish halted when near the prison house. The pair of them stood listening. A sergeant was calling the roll of the last room of the corridor, the room in which thirty-odd Americans were lodged at night.

" Our room. Too late! " whispered Ben Gerrish. " I hoped we might smuggle ourselves in before the doors are locked ——"

The sergeant boomed out the names in a sonorous voice, passing from one hammock to another. The two fugitives out in the darkness held their breath as they heard him call:

" Benjamin Gerrish."

No response! The other prisoners mocked the sergeant with jeers and cat-calls. He swore at them. The cries of derision were louder when he bellowed:

" Stephen Claghorn."

The noise spread to other rooms along the corridor. The prison was in an uproar. Evidently it had been discovered that these two were not the only American prisoners missing. No time would be lost in turning out the guard to search the yard. This was well known to the disconsolate Master Gerrish who stood rooted to the spot, still clutching Stephen by the arm.

The night had closed down by now, wet and gloomy. The yard was enveloped in darkness except for the lanterns at the gate and in the sentry boxes. It seemed utterly foolish for these two outcasts to take to their

heels. There was nowhere to go. Every nook and corner of the enclosure, every possible place of concealment, would be thoroughly ransacked.

Meekly to give themselves up and take the horrid punishment of weeks of confinement in the Black Hole was the only thing that could be done. Stephen fetched a long sigh. It was all his fault. His girth had been too big to fit the hole in the wall. The slim diet of bread and water, in the dark dungeon, would soon cure him of that.

The canny schoolmaster gripped him with a sudden excitement and pulled him nearer to the prison building. A quick word of caution and they moved as though stepping on eggs. Presently they flattened themselves against the side of the building, not far from the main door. There they waited with thumping hearts.

A few minutes later, one of the sergeants came out in great haste. In his hand was a tin lantern with a candle in it. He was about to run to the gate, presumably to carry a message, when a voice detained him. Another sergeant hurried out to ask a question. There seemed to be some confusion of orders. They delayed to argue the matter. One snatched a folded paper from his belt and flourished it under the other man's nose.

They stood no more than a few yards from Ben Gerrish and Stephen who were in mortal terror of that flickering lantern. But the two British sergeants were too absorbed in their dispute to glance about them. It

seemed as if they would never move on. At any moment the great bell in the prison tower might peal the alarm and summon the soldiers in barracks to turn out at the double-quick. But Ben Gerrish durst not stir while the sergeant's infernal lantern cast its beams athwart the prison doorway.

Very slowly and carefully Stephen Claghorn sat down and pulled off his shoes. There were times when he could be called a bright lad. He held one shoe poised, took aim, and hurled it at the tin lantern with all his might. A bull's-eye! No need to throw the other shoe. With a crash the lantern flew from the sergeant's hand as if bewitched. The candle was instantly snuffed. These two British sergeants, profoundly astonished, uttered loud words unfit to print and went charging off into the yard in different directions. It never occurred to them to turn back toward the prison building.

The coast was clear. Ben Gerrish galloped for the door. His young friend paddled close behind him on shoeless feet. The entrance was quite dark. They sidled into the corridor beyond. It was dimly lighted. So far, so good! It had been one chance in a thousand, but they were inside the prison. The trick, now, was to get into their own room undetected. The rash attempt was favored by the boisterous behavior of the mob of Yankee captives who were, by this time, singing patriotic songs and banging things about as if they intended pulling the prison up by the roots.

The Sergeant Calls the Roll

Gazing down the dim corridor, the schoolmaster and Stephen saw the sentries of the night watch tramp into one room after another and drag out some culprit who seemed to be a ringleader. These offenders were taken to the far end of the corridor and thrown into the guard-room. It was a harmless riot, more of a lark than anything else, among men who were without weapons and knew the folly of trying to break out into the yard.

Ben Gerrish perceived his opportunity. A sentry turned into the room in which these two fugitives belonged. The door was left to swing ajar. For the moment the corridor was empty. The sentry in the room was heard to raise a lusty cry for help. He had met with a rough reception. By the noise he made, his attention was very much engaged.

Before reinforcements could respond to the sentry's urgent summons, the long-legged schoolmaster was sprinting down the corridor like a deer. He reached the door of the room several strides ahead of the laboring Stephen. They doubled inside and joined the other Yankees who were jostling and punching the sentry. A brawny ship's carpenter was conducting a fine little rebellion of his own. He consented to strike his colors when three more soldiers came rushing in with fixed bayonets.

Then the room became curiously quiet. The other prisoners discovered that Master Gerrish and young Claghorn had returned in some mysterious manner.

The common impulse was to shield them by giving the sentries no more cause for intrusion. There was intense eagerness to learn what had happened in the yard. Therefore every man crawled into his hammock, as obedient as you please. A weary corporal of the guard stood listening in the corridor and thanked his stars that this bothersome lot of Yankees had calmed down for the night. Then he shot home the heavy bolts of the room door.

Safe against intrusion, the prisoners tumbled out of their hammocks and clustered about the two heroes of the hole in the wall. These proceeded to unfold the tragic tale of the lad who was so like a beef barrel that he had stoppered the path to freedom. The audience vowed to steal his rations and so prevent any more misadventures of that kind. So sincere was their praise of the schoolmaster for his unselfishness in refusing to escape that he was very happy and felt no regret at the loss of liberty.

" Steal my rations, if you like," said Stephen, " but I warn you that I am going to steal a pair of shoes tomorrow morning. You will never catch me claiming the pair I left in the yard. Anyhow, I hit the target with the first shot. I intend to sign on as a gunner if the Lord lets me go to sea again."

Having talked until they were drowsy, the occupants of the room returned to their hammocks which were swung from the ceiling beams in two long rows. As for

Stephen, he was fairly worn out. His eyes closed as soon as his head touched the folded jacket which he used as a pillow. Later in the night he was suddenly aroused by a jerk of the hammock rope and a rough voice shouting:

"Turn out for muster, you rascals! Stand at attention, every man beside his own hammock."

The pompous British colonel in command of the prison was making a tour of inspection to find out for himself what Americans were missing and what precautions had been taken. With him was a staff lieutenant, a file of infantrymen, and the sergeant who had called the roll in this particular room. The prisoners were ordered to step one pace to the front as their names were read off. The sergeant was a testy veteran with a double chin. To ask him to call the roll again was as much as to say he might have blundered.

Eyes straight ahead, fleshy visage frowning, he confronted one prisoner after another and rasped out the names, turning once to explain to the colonel:

"There's only two gone from this room, sir, as I reported. If one of the men will hold a light, I can show you ——"

"Very well, sergeant. Don't talk so much. As well as I can make out, there is a man to match every hammock."

There was one boyish prisoner who found great difficulty in smothering a triumphant "haw, haw." Even

the schoolmaster was snickering audibly. As stiff as a ramrod the sergeant paraded past three more mirthful prisoners and halted to look up from the paper in his hand. He blinked and gasped.

"HERE," chuckled Benjamin Gerrish.

"HERE," giggled Stephen Claghorn.

The sergeant's face turned as red as his coat. His eyes popped. In the whole of His Majesty's kingdom there was not a man so comically dumfounded. Speechless he glared until the colonel barked at him:

"Come, come, you numskull! Do you sleep standing? What the devil's wrong with you?"

"These—these are the t-two missing p-prisoners," stuttered the sergeant who scratched his head with a most foolish air.

"Who said I was missing?" demanded the schoolmaster.

"It would take a blind man to miss *me,*" grinned the stolid lad.

"B-but I called the roll and stood 'em in line right after sunset," protested the sergeant. "And this room was well searched, sir, and the other rooms besides. This long kill-joy of a Gerrish and the chunk of a Claghorn boy wasn't in the prison."

"Never left this room, I have no doubt," snapped the disgusted colonel. "An infernal stupid like you would walk right over them."

"His mind is not very strong, sir," remarked the im-

pudent Stephen. " Calling the roll does seem too much for him."

At this moment the afflicted sergeant did look as if his reason were tottering. Still in a trance, he muttered:

" Something queer about this, rotten queer. And I'll make you two jokers sweat for it, so 'elp me."

" Put this ass of a sergeant in the guard-house and rip off his stripes," said the colonel to the staff lieutenant. " Detail another non-com for this room."

They filed into the corridor. The door slammed behind them. Some time elapsed before the delighted audience was able to resume its slumbers. A man in one hammock imitated the sergeant's voice. Another carried on the colonel's part of the dialogue. Comedy was rare enough in the long night hours.

Before drowsing off, Stephen reached out to touch the schoolmaster's hand and murmured affectionately:

" You could have been missing as well as not, Ben, old trump. You didn't have to stay behind with me. But it would have been terrible lonesome without you."

" Perhaps I felt the same way, Steve, my boy. We signed on as shipmates in fair weather and foul."

CHAPTER VIII

TWO COMRADES TRY A NEW TRADE

WHEN the prisoners were turned into the yard next morning, Stephen scuffled along in a pair of discarded shoes given him by a friend. Those heavy brogues which he had pulled off to use as missiles could not be traced to him. Gossip was lively. The hole in the wall had been discovered and was well guarded until masons could be brought in to repair it. Investigation revealed that four Americans had escaped in this manner. Two of these had been caught while trying to climb over the outer wall. The other two were at large in Plymouth. Handbills would be posted and the usual reward proclaimed.

About nine o'clock two stone masons came through the gate. After them rattled a cart with lime and sand for mixing mortar. They set to work in a leisurely manner while an interested crowd looked on. Stephen hovered as near as the soldiers would permit, drawn to the spot by a sad fascination. By noon the rough stones composing the core of the wall had been replaced and the vigilance of the sentries could be relaxed. The idle prisoners drifted across the yard to await the midday meal.

Stephen loitered behind, looking about for Ben Gerrish who had been sitting in the sun with a wounded American captain. When the schoolmaster came rambling along he nodded absently and paused to stare at the two masons. Just then they laid down the trowel, stone hammer, and mortar bucket. These worthy artisans proceeded to slip off the long aprons which were daubed with mortar and plaster. They washed their faces and hands at a water barrel and unwrapped two parcels of bread and bacon.

It was dry chewing and there was beer in the cookhouse. This, at least, seemed to explain why they moved in that direction. No sooner had they vanished than Master Gerrish became active. A few quick words and Stephen was ready to play his part. They sauntered over as if to look at the unfinished job of masonry. This western corner of the wall happened to be deserted. With the crowd dispersed, there was nothing to hold a sentry there.

In a twinkling the pair of reckless adventurers had snatched up the masons' aprons which covered them like smocks. One took the mortar buckets and trowels, the other the basket of hammers and chisels. As they walked toward the gate they rubbed smears of mortar on their noses and cheeks.

" Cool and steady, Steve," warned Master Gerrish. " Pay no attention to the guards at the gates. We are much like the two masons, a tall, ill-favored fellow

with a loose walk and a pudgy younker of an apprentice."

"Steady she goes, Ben," bravely returned Stephen, "and 'ware breakers ahead. Pull down your cap and rub some bits of mortar on it."

From the more secluded corner of the yard they walked across the wide enclosure. They passed not far from groups of American prisoners who gave them no more than careless or indifferent glances. The disguises deceived their own friends. Stephen's knees were weak as they approached the main gate flanked by sentry boxes, but the extraordinary schoolmaster betrayed no uneasiness. Within ear-shot of the first sentry encountered, he said to his apprentice:

"An easier bit o' work than I reckoned, Jack. It took them pesky rebels longer to pull the stone out, I'll warrant. Rotten mortar, and it weathered bad or they couldn't ha' done it."

The bogus apprentice tried to frame a reply but the words stuck in his throat. They were fairly between the soldiers who paced to and fro with muskets upon their shoulders. To the affrighted Stephen they were ogres ten feet high, as their comrades-in-arms had appeared to be at the Salem North Bridge. It was all he could do to prevent his shaky legs from running away with him while Ben Gerrish slouched along like a true British workman and seemed to have all the time in the world.

They passed the inner gate. It was like a miracle. The outer gate was just in front of them. Ben Gerrish halted and set down the heavy bucket to rest his arm. This was clever acting but Stephen's nerves almost snapped. A spruce corporal stepped forward. Stephen's cheek needed no mortar to turn it white.

From his tunic the corporal extracted a black clay pipe and a crumpled leaf of tobacco and amiably inquired:

"Do ye carry a flint and steel? The fire in the grate is black and not a live coal nearer than the barracks. I am perishing for a smoke."

The master mason fumbled in the pocket of his apron and was much annoyed that he had lost his fireworks—probably stolen by one of the thieving Yankee knaves, said he—and bade the corporal a pleasant good-day.

The runaways marched sturdily on, moving a trifle faster. Before they could realize it, the towered gates, the frowning gray walls, the hateful sentinels of the Old Mill Prison were at their backs. The one impulse was to increase the distance as rapidly as possible. Haste was unwise, however, and so the truant masons plodded into one street after another, strangers with no destination.

They knew no friends in Plymouth and were almost penniless. There would be perhaps half an hour of leeway before the genuine masons in the prison yard discovered the loss of their tools and aprons. Then a

roll call and the alarm that for the second time in twenty-four hours Benjamin Gerrish and Stephen Claghorn were missing. Accurate descriptions of them would be broadcasted in Plymouth and the provost guard sent scouting in all directions.

Freedom is a precious thing, no matter how brief and perilous it may be. In the first flush of happiness and relief, Stephen felt like dancing a jig or turning a handspring. It was all he could do to keep from whistling "Yankee Doodle Dandy O." A merrier young stone mason was never seen in Plymouth town.

"Enjoy it while it lasts, Ben," said he, "and bid dull care begone. That wise old noddle of yours will hatch some new trick. We are safe for a little while. And do look at the small brick houses all huddled together, and the jolly men and women in the doorways. Would they be cruel to such harmless vagabonds as us? I wish I might lay eyes on the dame that patted my cheek when we were marched ashore from the *Saucy Jack*. Oh, look yonder—the broad water shining in the sun, and the tall ships at anchor. It is Plymouth Sound and it opens to the sea, Ben. If we could only get afloat ——"

"Those ships are British men-of-war," gloomily answered Master Gerrish, "and I can see no way of escaping to the friendly shores of France. If we strike out into the countryside, we run the risk of being taken up as strangers and homeless men."

"Then we had best find some hiding-place until night," said Stephen. "Meanwhile shall we masquerade as masons? I am sick of lugging these confounded tools, and my eyes are full of mortar."

"We'll not discard them yet," answered the schoolmaster, "until we are farther from the prison and the barracks. Nobody turns to look at us in the street. My notion is that we should steer for the wooded hills beyond the town, and yet the sight of water draws me on. 'Tis mortal hard to turn away from the harbor."

"A small boat, Ben—the littlest cockle-shell," sighed the lad, "and I'd chance it sooner than be caught and cast into the Black Hole."

"Well, we cannot venture down among the sailors now. Let us get our bearings first. It will never do to go blundering about. They would ask us awkward questions. If we venture to show ourselves on Plymouth Hoe it will be close to the citadel and the soldiers and the marines from the Fleet. In a naval port like this, loiterers must give an account of themselves, even though they be honest masons."

"I see it, Ben," reluctantly agreed the apprentice. "You need more time for your wits to contrive something or other. But we are like mice in a trap. Plague take it! We did one deed of shrewdness in walking out through those gates. This plight seemed so much easier to solve. I wish you could find a black gown instead

of that filthy apron. You might pass as a Loyalist clergyman from New England, recently banished by his rebel flock. And at a pinch I might play the godly nephew ——"

"If wishes were wings we could fly away home," said the matter-of-fact Master Gerrish. "You will soon be clamoring for food and there is nothing to eat but the mortar left in the bucket. Five shillings is our whole fortune. I shall have to venture into a shop and buy bread and cheese. But for the present we must keep veering out of the thickly settled town, until the afternoon wanes."

Sadly Stephen turned away from the alluring prospect of the harbor, Sutton Pool, the Catwater, and the wide reaches of Plymouth Sound. He limped onward in silence. The broken shoes hurt his feet. His high spirits had ebbed. The dream of liberty was a mockery. And there was no dinner under his belt. This in itself was enough to make him melancholy.

Boys and girls of his own age brushed past him on the narrow flagstones, going home from school or sent on household errands. In dress and speech, save for small differences, they reminded him of his own friends in Salem. It seemed absurd and incredible that he should be their mortal enemy. If he told them who he was, they might raise a hue-and-cry and mercilessly hunt him back to prison.

"My heels are raw already, Ben," was the plaintive

announcement, " and my stockings are nothing but holes. I must sit down and wrap my feet in strips torn from this apron."

" Beat the lime dust out of it first," advised the other, " or your heels will be worse than ever. And make haste. We cannot afford to dawdle now. My ears twitch with dread of hearing the signal gun fired at the prison."

They had halted in front of a comfortable residence with ivied walls and a trimly clipped hedge. At one side was a small lawn and a gravel walk. Stephen had pulled off one shoe and was inspecting the damage when a young woman came running out of the gate in the hedge. She was not a servant, this was to be read at a glance. The schoolmaster forgot his humble rôle and doffed his cap but clapped it on again and stared like a clumsy clown.

" I saw you from my window," explained this fair-haired English maiden, " and you simply must come in and set our chimney pots up again, or stick them in, or whatever it is that masons do to them. The great gale blew them down last week and the oven refuses to draw. The kitchen reeks with smoke and the cook is in a state of mutiny."

Young Stephen stood propped against the hedge with his foot in his hand. He was not only startled but entranced. For the life of him he could think of nothing to say, but Master Gerrish was not a man to lose

his head at sight of a charming girl. He replied, with an air of indifference:

" I might have a look at your kitchen chimney, Miss. If the pots got smashed when they blowed off, there's no sense in tinkerin' with 'em."

" Oh, the new chimney pots are waiting for a mason," earnestly exclaimed the attractive young person. " And we had a waggoner fetch the material to mix the mortar, enough to stick chimney pots on twenty houses. And you happened to be passing with your tools and aprons. Isn't it fortunate! "

" I dunno, Miss. We've done a hard day's job already, so we 'ave, and my young mate is sort o' crippled. A bit of nourishment might chirk him up. What say, Jack? Do you feel like hoistin' a mortar bucket up a ladder? "

" For a plate of prime vittles an' double wages I might oblige the lady," answered the hungry apprentice. Life had taken on a rosy hue. This was a gorgeous episode. Good fortune had not deserted them. Here was a snug refuge in which they could be stowed away until nightfall. What the schoolmaster knew about resetting chimney pots remained to be seen but it went without saying that he would make a noble attempt to pass muster as a competent mason.

The gratified young lady agreed to the terms. The cook had gone out for the afternoon but there was food in the cupboard. Then her soft heart was wrung with

pity for the poor lad as he tried to put on his shoe. She would find ointment and clean rags to bind his feet before he climbed to the roof of the house. Her attention was turned from the long-faced master mason who felt a twinge of jealousy.

" You are not Devon men," said she, with a smile for Stephen. " Your speech sounds a trifle strange in these parts."

" London is where my kinfolk be," truthfully answered Ben Gerrish, with a nervous glance over his shoulder. " Plymouth is new to us, in a manner of speakin'. If you don't mind we'll be a-gettin' on with that little job of yours."

He was fidgeting to move behind the friendly shelter of the hedge. Stephen winked at him and hobbled with one shoe off while the girl tripped on ahead to explore the cupboard. She was a warm-hearted young person and Stephen dared to hope they had found a friend in need.

" I can't believe she would be wicked enough to send us back to prison, Ben. If she would let us hide in the carriage house, under the hay, and smuggle in some food, say for a week or so, we might find some scheme of escape to France. The soldiers will soon tire of searching for us."

" Ssssh-h-h, you rattle-pate. There are men in the family, of course. And they would be serving the king to seize us as dastardly rebels. Just now it is any port

in a storm. Look sharp and don't let that foolish tongue wag."

There was a blissful sense of rest and security in sitting upon the stone steps by the kitchen door, well hidden from the highway, while the pleasant young lady brought out cold beef and pickles and a jug of cider.

" Masons are so hard to find," said she, " that I must humor you or you may change your minds and leave me in distress with a balky oven. My father spent a whole day in the quest and, at last, found a mason who faithfully promised to come to-day. But this morning he sent word that he had been summoned to the Old Mill Prison to mend a breach in the wall. It had been made by those desperate American prisoners-of-war."

" Er—ahem—is your father at home, Miss? " faltered Ben Gerrish. For once he was confused and taken all aback. This mention of her parent was shooting too close to the mark. With a gulp the schoolmaster went on to say:

" What I mean to say is, Miss, that maybe he'd sooner wait for this other mason than to have you hirin' strangers you know nothin' about. In which case me and the lad'll tramp along, thank 'ee kindly, Miss."

Stephen was ready for flight, his cheeks stuffed with cold beef and pickles, but their hostess calmed them by saying:

" My father went to Devonport this morning and I am not expecting him until late. He will be delighted

to find the chimney pots in place and the cook in a better temper. Have you had plenty to eat, Jack?"

"Yes, ma'am, and my hearty thanks. You'll be surprised to see how nimble I can run up and down a ladder with a load o' mortar."

"Oh, yes, the ladder," she cried. "I will show you where it is kept. But you must not carry heavy loads, Jack, when you walk so lame. I fear this frowning mason is a hard master."

"The kindest, noblest master that ever a bungling apprentice had," exclaimed the lad, in an unexpected outburst of feeling.

They set the ladder against the kitchen which was a low, tile-roofed wing of the rambling house. Stephen mixed some mortar in hit-or-miss fashion while his master inspected the chimney pots with a knowing air. These were round pipes of glazed earthenware which had to be set into the square tops of the squat brick chimneys. Of considerable height, they increased the draught and were to be seen jutting above the roof of every English homestead.

"Two of them belong atop the kitchen," said Ben. "The rest of them blew off the main house. There is work here for to-morrow, if we could drag it out, but her father will be home to-night and, no doubt, he can tell a counterfeit mason from a real one."

"And more work after the next gale of wind," chuckled Stephen, "for I misdoubt your masonry is as

good as your Latin and trigonometry. A fair haven, this, Ben, to lie up in, were it not for that meddlesome father of hers."

"Aye, Steve, but remember also that he is likely to read a handbill,—that we strolled out of the prison disguised as a mason and his apprentice."

CHAPTER IX

THE FAIREST ROSE OF DEVON

IN a gingerly manner the master mason crept up the ladder. He found that the pitch of the roof permitted him to wriggle over the tiles to the ridge which he straddled, with a grip on the chimney. Warily he pulled himself to a standing posture and felt convinced that he was doomed to slide off and break his neck. In anxious accents he called down to Stephen to shoulder a chimney pot and clamber up with it.

This was no great task for the sturdy apprentice who had been rated a handy seaman in the privateer brig *Atlantic*. Balancing himself at the eaves, he flung the master mason a bit of rope, the other end of which was made fast to the cumbersome chimney pot.

"There you are, Ben. Haul away, blast your eyes. I can't dig my toes into these tiles and shove the chimney pot too."

"But how can I let go to pull?" implored the perplexed Master Gerrish.

"Straddle the ridge, you dolt, and heave and belay. And don't let the dratted thing go adrift or it will bowl me off the roof."

Fearfully Master Gerrish obeyed orders. The chimney pot caught on the rough edges of the tiles and Stephen had to release it. In a succession of frantic jerks it went bumping up the roof. Between them they managed to lift and lay it across the top of the chimney as a temporary resting place.

"But we can never set it on end and hold it there," mourned the mason. "And as for handling that bucket of mortar, I ——"

"Hold tight until I finish laughing at you, Ben. I had nothing to say because an apprentice should show respect for his master, but unless you can find some bits of plank to build a staging around this chimney ——"

"Right enough. I appear to have overlooked it," was the sheepish admission. "This situation does not lend itself to logical thought. I have seen masons at work on chimneys in Salem. For heaven's sake, Steve, get the stuff for a staging."

"Easier said than done, but I can try," grinned the apprentice. "Shut your eyes tight and hug the chimney while I go below."

Stephen slid to the edge of the roof and was about to descend the ladder when the interested young lady reappeared from the house. She stood gazing upward. Something seemed to surprise her. She clasped her hands and cried excitedly:

"What a very odd way of sticking up chimney pots! Are you a pair of acrobats?"

The Fairest Rose of Devon

" My master is an uncommon kind of mason," soberly explained the lad from his perch on the top round of the ladder. " Like as not he will stand on his head and wield the trowel just to entertain you."

" Mercy sakes, how dangerous," she exclaimed. " Are you jesting? He embraces the chimney as though afraid of falling."

" 'Tis to prevent the loose brick from rattling down, Miss. Now if I can lay hands on some stray pieces of board in your shed and a few spikes, we'll have the mortar flying in a jiffy."

" You like to make it fly, don't you, Jack? " said she. " Your face is all splattered with it. I am sure your own mother wouldn't know you. A good scrub with soap and hot water would make you a jolly, wholesome lad. You remind me of my youngest brother who is a midshipman in the crack frigate *Surprise* on the North American blockade."

From the chimney came the fretful voice of the marooned master mason:

" Will you leave me clinging like a barnacle, you lazy scamp? "

" Aye, aye, sir. Here goes," cheerily answered the apprentice as he twisted himself around to foot it down the ladder. But he suddenly ceased to move and was fixed in an attitude of frozen attention. Instantly he forsook all idea of helping with a staging or anything else. In stealthy fashion he lifted one foot after the

other and regained the top of the ladder. At the edge of the roof he sprawled flat upon his stomach and peered down over the eaves.

In past the hedge had strolled a compactly built, red-haired young man wearing the uniform of an officer of the Royal Navy. A glimpse of the blue coat and gold epaulets was enough to dismay Stephen Claghorn. Moreover, this intruding lieutenant impressed him as being both muscular and pugnacious. The fair damsel regarded him as a welcome visitor in spite of his auburn thatch and his freckles. He was allowed to take and hold both her hands as he warmly exclaimed:

"By Jove, Stella, my darling, if you knew how I have been counting the days—beating up Channel in a blighted hooker that sailed like a barge—a fortnight in London River awaiting the pleasure of the Admiralty —and to Plymouth by crawling post-chaise."

"And can you stay a while, Arthur dear? Are you on leave?"

"Alas, no. It was prodigious luck, getting to Plymouth at all. I am transferred to the *Thunderer,* Vice Admiral Sir Howard Digby's flag-ship which is fitting at the dockyard for service in the Mediterranean. I reported on board this morning, fagged for sleep after a beastly night on the road, and the crusty post-captain sent me ashore for the day on special duty. And here I am, stealing an hour with the fairest rose of Devon."

Arm-in-arm the sweethearts sauntered to an arbor in

the small enclosure of lawn behind the hedge. The timid mason's apprentice who had been viewing them from the edge of the kitchen roof now showed signs of life. The British naval warrior had no intention of wasting his precious hour, and the fairest rose of Devon seemed to be of the same mind. They had eyes only for each other. However, conscience doth make cowards of us all. Stephen felt no eagerness to parade back and forth in front of the brisk lieutenant of H. M. S. *Thunderer*. Therefore he crawled up the roof to explain matters to Master Gerrish whom the delay had dreadfully vexed.

"You loom up most comical, Ben, and this brindle-top lieutenant has an eye like a hawk. I don't like the color of his hair and never did, not since 'Reddy' Benson whipped me in the old sail-loft at home."

"But I cannot stay propped up here like a figure-head," grumbled Master Gerrish, "while those silly turtle-doves bill and coo in the arbor. Go fetch me some planks."

"Not I. Let yourself down behind the chimney and throw a leg over the peak of the roof for a grapple. Then you won't be so blessed ridiculous. I will slide as far as the ladder and keep a lookout. The lovers are apt to go into the house. 'Tis 'most too public on the lawn."

This was the lieutenant's opinion. The fairest rose of Devon was not unwilling. They sauntered in the direc-

tion of the house as Stephen resumed his station at the top of the ladder. They passed near enough for Stephen to hear the lieutenant say:

"My special duty ashore for the day, Stella, my angel? Oh, it is all done, thank the Lord. I went to the Old Mill Prison to examine certain men suspected of being British deserters. A good many of them are found in the crews of American privateers and merchant ships. I discovered five of the blackguards to-day and sent them to the Devonport prison hulk in double-irons."

"They deserted their own flag to join the rebels, Arthur? What vile creatures! But perhaps they had been forced into our service by the brutal press gangs. These kidnappers are a sore grievance to the English seaports."

"We must have sailors to man the Fleet, lovely Stella. Our wooden walls are England's bulwark against a world in arms. I wish we might draft the scores of American seamen I saw in the Old Mill Prison to-day—strapping fellows although they looked pale and dull from confinement. If I had my way they would be flogged aboard English men-of-war and compelled to serve the king."

"Tell me more about them, Arthur. I cannot help but be sorry ——"

"You are too soft-hearted, sweet maid. Lawless rogues! They keep the prison in a stew, what with plots and stratagems to escape. The devil is in them. Fancy

what occurred this very day! Two Americans walked out of the prison at high noon, past the guards at both gates, and were as cool about it as a May morning."

Miss Stella was so diverted that she remained standing in the middle of the gravel walk. Arthur required no urging to finish the scandalous tale. He was quite annoyed by the impudence of the two Americans who had made sport of the king's sentinels. In vehement accents he went on to say:

"Some of these caitiffs had knocked a hole in the wall, do you see, and the prison warder sent out for masons to mend it. These two Yankees waited for the dinner hour and cribbed the masons' smocks or whatever they wear, and all the tools and things, and calmly toddled away."

"How delightfully ingenious!" exclaimed the fairest rose of Devon who should have been properly indignant. "Disguised themselves as masons and gulled the stupid soldiers?"

"And were even graceless enough to chat with a corporal at the gate," sourly added the lieutenant. "I was at pains to get good descriptions of the tricksters and am keeping an eye to windward. It would be a duty and a pleasure to lay the rascals by the heels."

"That reminds me," quickly exclaimed the girl. "I employed two masons this afternoon to fix the chimney pots ——" She glanced at the kitchen roof and hesitated. Close to the eaves the jolly young apprentice

was clinging to the tiles and listening to every word. All that could be seen of the master mason was a leg crooked over the ridge of the roof, and one hand clutching a corner of the chimney. For innocent artisans from London their behavior was peculiar, to say the least.

Feminine compassion sometimes defies all the shackles of law and custom. This English girl was a woman before she was a subject of the king. The color rushed to her cheek and pity suffused her eyes as she said:

" These masons will get along without my supervision, Arthur. Let us go inside for tea."

The alert lieutenant marked her emotion and could not fathom it. As she stole another glance at the roof he blurted:

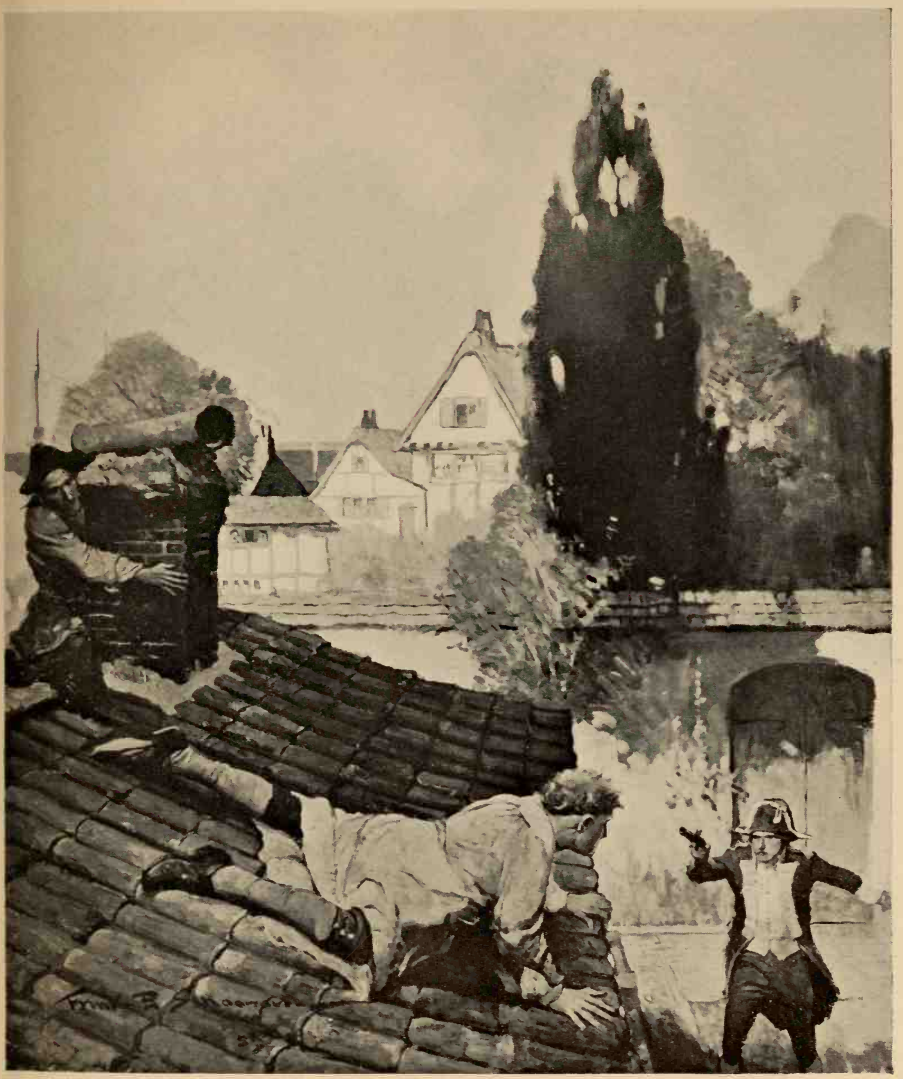
" Masons, did you say? What's that? Do you know who they are? Where the deuce did you find them? "

" They are very decent, sober fellows, Arthur. They happened to be passing while going home from work."

" By Jove, let me have a look at them, Stella. I say, they are not very industrious. What ails the youngster? He is having a fit or something like that. Where is the other one? Ye gods and fishes, all he shows is a leg! Blow me, but this *is* an extraordinary go! My dear girl, you have been hoodwinked. These masons of yours are drunk or crazy, or ——"

The lieutenant ripped out a deep-sea expletive, slapped his thigh, and roared:

" A broad, heavy lad of seventeen years who looks



From Under His Coat He Pulled a Pistol

older—curly brown hair—merry features—a slightly crooked nose with a bump on it! Death and damnation, this is the American prisoner, Stephen Claghorn! What is the older one like, Stella? Tall and big-boned, gawky gestures—sallow complexion, straight, black hair—long chin, saturnine features—a man past thirty years?"

"I—I failed to notice him closely," faltered the rose of Devon. "His manners were genteel for a laboring man, that is all I can say. You are mistaken, Arthur. These are no villains and traitors."

"I'll stake my head on it," shouted her impetuous suitor as he advanced to the foot of the ladder. From under his coat he pulled a pistol and primed and cocked it. Stephen Claghorn blinked down at him with the expression of a terrified owl. He was about to obey the mandate of that long-barreled pistol which had an eloquence all its own. As he clawed for the ladder to clamber down and surrender, a quavering yell from the ridge of the roof caused him to turn his head.

Ben Gerrish had vanished. His wail was instantly succeeded by a scraping, tinkling noise from the opposite slope of the roof, as if buttons and knee-buckles were sliding rapidly. Then there were the sounds of branches cracking and snapping. A heavy body had hurtled into the trees or shrubbery. A solid thump, and it was to be inferred that the master mason, falling like a meteor, had reached terra firma. He announced that

he was alive by raising a shout to Stephen to follow him over the roof.

What prevented was that ugly pistol which the red-headed lieutenant handled most unlike a novice. Stephen was preparing to resume his compulsory journey down the ladder. Then the mental picture of the schoolmaster tumbling off the roof so tickled his simple sense of humor that he forgot the pistol and erupted in a tremendous " haw, haw, haw."

This enraged the peppery lieutenant who pulled trigger. The ball whistled by Stephen's ear. This so startled the jocular apprentice that he slipped and knocked the ladder sidewise with his foot. With no success he endeavored to catch hold of the tiles. Off the edge of the roof he shot into space.

The lieutenant was dodging the ladder as it came toppling down. Alert young man that he was, here was once where he failed to keep an eye to windward. Stella shrieked a warning but it was too late. Arms and legs whirling, Stephen Claghorn gained momentum according to the well-known law of gravitation. Falling from roofs was not a habit of his but he was far more successful than could have been foreseen.

The lieutenant threw up his hands and staggered back but was a fraction of a second too late to avoid a collision which smote him like a battering-ram. It was no trifle to have Stephen Claghorn dropped in this manner upon one's head and shoulders. Prone upon the gravel walk

lay a competent gunnery lieutenant of H. M. S. *Thunderer,* insensible and apparently dead. Without intending it, he had saved a plump Yankee rebel from serious injury.

Rebounding like a ball, Stephen wiped the blood from his long-suffering nose, brushed the gravel from a barked knee, shook himself and murmured:

" He *would* shoot me, would he? Serves him mighty well right!"

CHAPTER X

CABBAGES AND A DUTCH GALLIOT

BADLY shaken though he was in mind and body, Stephen perceived that his career as a mason was ruined, also that this was no place in which to linger a moment longer than could be avoided. He saw the fairest rose of Devon run to kneel beside her prostrate lover and stroke his pallid brow.

"He breathes," she cried in poignant distress. "Oh, Arthur, do you know me? Are you mortally hurt?"

With this she flew into the house to summon help. Stephen made ready to fly elsewhere. Shattered was the dream of a merciful Stella who might help him to hide away. It was too much to expect, after he had stretched her lover flat, with his head fairly driven into his shoulders.

What had become of that reliable right bower, Master Benjamin Gerrish? Panic took hold of Stephen. He ripped off the mason's apron and flung it aside. To dash around the front of the house in search of the schoolmaster or out through the gate in the hedge seemed like madness. The pistol shot, the shouts, must have been heard in the highway.

In this extremity the hunted youth thought only of bolting for the least dangerous exit. Wildly he sprinted for the rear of the lawn, and dodged into an alley between a shed and a carriage house. There he paused uncertainly to listen for a call from Ben Gerrish. It came not to his ears. He moved on, rapidly, and presently emerged into a vegetable garden among rows of winter cabbages. Here he halted again, hidden by the brick walls of the garden.

Was it worth while trying any longer to elude capture? Unless he had the astute schoolmaster as a comrade, the last glimmer of hope was dead. Most likely they would meet again in the Black Hole of the Old Mill Prison.

But there was no pluck in giving up until you were beaten. And every hour of freedom was a jewel beyond price. This thought steadied the lonely lad. He recovered a little from his blind panic. It occurred to him, as a sagacious inspiration, that perhaps both he and Master Gerrish were better off to be separated. They were known to have been intimate in the prison and to have escaped together. They had been coupled in the descriptions sent out. This was to be concluded from the talk of Stella's naval lieutenant as overheard from the edge of the roof.

" Good old Ben may be luckier without me," reflected Stephen as he resumed his stealthy retreat between two cabbage rows. " It was selfish of me to hang to his coat-

tails. My own chance is not worth a rotten cabbage, but ——"

He spied an empty basket at the end of the garden. It was a large basket with stout handles. Delay might be fatal but here was a heaven-sent opportunity for a strong and willing lad to change his occupation. In a frenzy of haste he stooped to pluck cabbages, twisting off the roots and outer leaves. Into the basket he hurled the cabbages until it was filled to the top. He waited to scour the mortar from his face, using a sleeve of his shirt. Then he rubbed dirt on his breeches and stockings to hide the white splotches of lime.

Not as a mason's apprentice but as a strapping young green-grocer's assistant did this Yankee fugitive squeeze through a small gate in the garden wall with a heavy basket of cabbages upon his shoulder. He found himself in the grounds of another residence where clumps of evergreens were tall enough to enable him to pass from one to another unobserved.

In an open space near the road a doddering old laborer was raking twigs and dry leaves but he merely nodded and waved a hand. Out into the highway trudged Stephen and his burden of cabbages which rested as light as a feather. As rapidly as possible he proposed to remove himself from this quarter of Plymouth.

Once more there tugged at his heart the desire to rove down to the harbor among the ships and sailors. It was

like the instinct of the homing pigeon. Salem boys were seldom far from the sights and sounds of salt water. In the streets of these clustered towns of Plymouth and Devonport and Stonehouse, bewildered Stephen could think of no possible place of refuge.

To stray alone into rural England seemed no more attractive. Without Ben Gerrish he felt rudderless. But the sea was always friendly and familiar and there might be neutral ships in port, French or Spanish or a merchant trader from the Low Countries. Surely the seamen of one of these vessels would befriend him if he could manage to stow himself away on board.

The basket of cabbages offered him an errand and a pretext. He would have no need of inventing any elaborate tale to explain himself. His master, the greengrocer, had sent him down to the quays to deliver this basket of fresh stuff to a ship's cook. This would be taken for granted.

Having traversed a safe distance from the scene of his sensational farewell to the mason's trade, Stephen let his aching feet lag. The basket of cabbages had been growing heavier. He set it down to ease a weary shoulder. He was fast losing his affection for these ponderous English cabbages which, at first, he had borne so gladly. The cursed things were like a basket of dipsy leads.

Stephen looked like any other lazy lad of Plymouth who had little thought for earning his wages. Devon-

shire bred them big of body and strong of limb, with cheeks like red apples. Nor was there anything to draw comment in the fact that he was bursting out of his clothes which were torn and dirty. A green-grocer's boy was not presumed to be a dandy.

He whistled as he rambled on or stopped to stare at this unaccustomed sight and that—a rumbling artillery wagon, the dusty mail coach with the guard blowing his horn—a Punch and Judy show at a street corner.

"What price for a cabbage?" asked a soldier in rifle-green with a blowsy wench on his arm.

The lad almost jumped out of his shoes but kept his voice steady as he replied:

"Thrippence, to a sojer of the king."

"Rare big uns they is, Bill," said the woman. "Buy two."

The rifleman dropped six coppers into Stephen's grimy paw. The transaction suggesting the idea of putting more pence in his pocket by selling cabbages, but not to British soldiers if it could be avoided. The sight of the uniform gave him a cold sensation in the pit of his stomach.

He wandered into mean streets in the direction of the water-front where the ancient houses leaned crazily and the roofs were covered with straw thatch. Ragged children swarmed in the muddy gutters. Unkempt women gossiped and quarreled or followed their men into the squalid taverns. Costermongers whacked their

donkeys and cried their wares. Sailors were dancing, their hands on their hips, while a blind fiddler plied a nimble bow.

The breeze swept through these filthy streets and brought the smell of tar and the salt savor of the sea. Stephen passed a rigging loft and loitered to listen to the whir of the yarn spindles and the tap-tap of the serving mallets. Closer to the quays was a spar-maker's shed. The fragrant shavings were curling from a long mast. It had once towered in a New England pine forest. Homesick yet singularly comforted was the vagrant lad with the basket of cabbages. He no longer felt so alien and helpless. This was a glimpse of a world he had known all his life.

"Ben Gerrish was too timid about venturing down among these seafaring folk," he said to himself. "His head may be packed full of the science of navigation but he is a landsman by training and a lubber by nature."

By luck his errant course had led him well clear of the citadel and the area of the military patrols. He was in a slum quarter, very thickly peopled, where sailormen of various climes and races foregathered to eat, drink, and be merry. Swarthy Portuguese lurched by him with gold rings in their ears. Flaxen-bearded Norwegians in fur jackets and wrinkled sea-boots jostled the lithe Genoese who wore dirks on their hips and were mighty quick to draw them.

Slow-spoken, minding their own affairs, the idling

sailors and fishermen of Devon were kith and kin of those immortal heroes who had sailed around the world with Francis Drake and had manned the little ships of Plymouth port to attack and shatter the Spanish Armada.

Amidst this queer jumble of humanity Stephen lost the fear that some trick of speech or mannerism might arouse suspicion. With his coppers he bought loaves of bread which he stuffed inside his shirt. Growing bolder, he tried to scrape acquaintance with several foreign seamen but, alas, they spoke no English at all and he was baffled. This disheartened him because he was reluctant to accost an English mariner. Awkward questions might be asked him nor did he care to provoke scrutiny. Already the town crier might have spread the tidings of his escape from prison. No basket of cabbages could conceal that crooked nose which figured in the accurate description of him.

He limped to the nearest quay, which was a rough rampart of stone, and found a resting place upon a pile of fishing gear. In his mind's eye he had fancied the ships as moored head and stern beside the wharves as they were in Salem harbor. But the rise and fall of the tide was much greater in Plymouth Sound, as he quickly noted. Most of the vessels were in the stream, either waiting to enter the sheltered pools or handling their cargoes by means of lighters.

At this particular quay a sloop was unloading fire-

wood and a small brig hoisting out casks of molasses from the West Indies. Both were unmistakably British. They were also unready to go to sea. They failed to interest an American prisoner-of-war with a basket of cabbages. Riding at anchor a few hundred yards out, however, was a Dutch galliot, broad in the beam and as round in the bow as an apple, with one tall mast and a little one stepped far aft. A comfortable, motherly craft did she look to Stephen as he wistfully studied her.

The galliot had hoisted sail. Three or four seamen in baggy breeches were puttering about the deck. The wind was so light that the pennant drooped at the topmast truck.

"She may be outward bound and waiting for a breeze," thought the boyish exile, gazing with his chin in his hand. "If I could only get off to her in a boat! There never was a Dutchman that had cabbages enough."

Not far from the quay was a bit of shingly beach upon which a dozen skiffs and wherries were drawn up. Fishermen were calking one and tarring another of them. If he had some coppers, mused Stephen, he might hire a fisherman to row him off to the galliot or perhaps he could pay his fare with a cabbage or two.

There was a certain risk in this, however, because these fishermen might be on the *qui vive* to catch American prisoners and earn the reward. No doubt they would begin to go home from the beach at sunset. Then it

would be easy to steal a boat and put off to the galliot alone. The breeze was unlikely to freshen until the turn of the tide.

As a green-grocer's boy, Stephen felt fairly secure to wait on the quay. It would not be long. The light was fading on the harbor. The sun almost touched a range of hills beyond. The fishermen still toiled with tar-pots and oakum. Soon, however, the most of them shambled away but a few, alas, turned to mending the nets which were hung up to dry. Their women came down to help them. It appeared as if they intended to work as long as they could see and then to push afloat and set the nets at night.

Restless Stephen walked up and down the quay until twilight. The Dutch galliot was still at anchor, her sails hanging listless. Stephen wetted a finger and held it to feel for any change of wind. The air was still quiet. He concluded to venture as far as a pump in a near-by street and quench his thirst. The dry bread crumbs stuck in his throat. He carried with him the burdensome basket of cabbages. At the pump he courteously plied the handle for several bold girls with pails on their arms. They chaffed him with noisy good-humor which he returned in kind. After a brief delay he was about to return to the quay.

The gloomy buildings reëchoed a sudden, amazing uproar. It filled the streets. Men were running, women screaming. Out of an ale-house sailors came

tumbling, some of them drunk, all in violent haste to flee and hide. Completely bewildered, Stephen heard them yelling:

"The press gang! The bloody press!"

"Mind your eye! Crack on and scud for it, ye beggars!"

"'Ware the king's crimps!"

Into the street where Stephen stood dashed a squad of seamen led by a midshipman. They wore the round glazed hats and flowing kerchiefs of bluejackets of the Royal Navy and were armed with bludgeons and short cutlasses. From another alley emerged a second group of them, all making for the ale-house at top speed to surprise and trap the patrons.

Stephen, to his horror, found himself hemmed in between these two forces. He dropped the basket and stood stupefied. To be dragged aboard a king's ship for years of wretched servitude was a dire calamity unforeseen. The brutal bluejackets were swiftly closing in on him and he could not find even a cellar to dive into. In a cold fit of anguish he comprehended that he would be pounced upon as a fine young sailor for the Fleet.

Other victims were fighting madly in front of the ale-house, fuddled with drink, feet and fists flying, the thud of the bludgeons as they went down like logs. Women were in the mêlée, using teeth and nails like furies. Plymouth was not fond of the press gang.

A brawny boatswain's mate caught sight of Stephen

and made a rush at him. Two seamen were at his heels. Tame surrender was intolerable. To fight in the last ditch was Stephen's creed even though it meant a broken head. Fickle fortune might be kind at the very last moment. Snatching up one of those solid cabbages, the desperate Stephen flung it. He reached for another. He filled the air with cabbages. They flew like round shot. To be hit by one of them was nothing to laugh at.

The boatswain's mate was stopped in his tracks. There was no dodging a broadside, a salvo of cabbages. Stephen concluded to try to duck past him but the two British bluejackets acting as reinforcements were quick enough to block the manœuvre. The hunted lad turned to flee in another direction. The mob surged away from the ale-house and filled the street.

In black despair Stephen halted with his back against the wall of a rickety house. Just then a wooden shutter was pushed open close beside him. He spun about and confronted a window in which was a very old man with a lighted candle in his skinny hand. He saw the youngster's frightened face. With a bob of the head and a toothless grin he clawed Stephen's shoulder, waved a beckoning finger, and blew out the candle.

A leap for the window ledge and Stephen fell into the room head over heels. He heard the heavy shutter swing shut and an iron bar drop into the sockets. The room was in pitch darkness. The old man was muttering to himself in a cracked voice while he fumbled along

the wall. Stephen sat huddled on the floor and devoutly thanked his Maker. He listened to the hideous commotion in the street. It died for the moment and then swelled again as if the mob attempted to rescue some kidnapped sailor. It was to conjecture that the boatswain's mate had been forced to forego the pursuit of the stout lad who had bombarded him with cabbages.

In the darkened room, at length, the sparks flew from flint and steel. A bit of tinder burst into flame and the aged rescuer relighted the tallow dip. It was a slow task because his hand shook with palsy or else he was in a very ague of terror. His dirty wig kept slipping over one eye while his nut-cracker jaw worked up and down in a continuous mumble of disconnected words.

In a tattered dressing-gown he went rocking across the room upon shaky legs and peered at the great bolts of the timbered door. Then his strength failed him and he collapsed in an armchair. So blanched and still was the wrinkled face that he appeared to be dead. Stephen picked himself up and rummaged in a cupboard until he found a bottle of brandy and a spoon. A few sips and the old man was wagging his head and again talking to himself.

A pistol shot in the street, a wailing cry for help, and he trembled so pitifully that Stephen endeavored to soothe him.

"The press gang will do you no harm, grandsire.

Is all this fear on my account? Then show me how to slip out by some other way before they break in. It was noble of you to offer refuge but ——"

The sound of the lad's voice seemed to revive the ancient one. His disordered mind was lucid as he quavered:

" 'Twas in the nick of time, hey? All but had you, the murderin' picaroons! I did poke my head out for a squint—and to curse the black souls of 'em—oh, the dear grandson o' mine that was dragged out of this same house by the filthy man-stealers and thrown into a boat with the shackles on him. Comed no word of him in seven year, and then a shipmate to tell me he was dead of the fever in Havana."

The grandsire sagged down into the chair like a bundle of old clothes. The fitful spark of intelligence had dimmed. Stephen Claghorn felt sorrier for this mournful old derelict than for himself. The room told its own tale of wretched poverty and forlorn neglect. The lost grandson had been the prop and consolation, surmised Stephen, who said some words of sympathy which seemed to pass unheard. A long silence in the room and then the decrepit figure in the chair came to life again. With a childish grimace he crooned:

" Home from the sea be ye, Willum, dear lad? Never was a grandson so thewy and hale! The image of your daddy, Willum, that was my son Reuben—or was it John—and him killed aboard the *Intrepid* wi' Hawke

in Quiberon Bay. They let you go, Willum? And will ye stay? It won't be for long ——"

Stephen's lip quivered. He could not bear to mar the delusion of this wandering mind. He walked over to touch the old man's withered cheek and say:

"Aye, granther, I have made my last voyage in a king's ship. And safe and hearty I be, as you can see for yourself."

They heard a louder uproar in the street, after a brief lull. The old man tottered from the chair and clutched at the lad with a thin cry of:

"The press gang, Willum! 'Tis you they want. They'll batter down the door—God's mercy, what can I do?"

"Steady, granther. They have not begun to search the houses. Maybe they will leave us alone. And your doors and shutters are strong and well barred."

"They saw ye climb in at the window, Willum darling. Seven year will they keep ye between decks afore ye die of the Havana fever."

"They must first catch me," exclaimed Stephen who was sadly uneasy. This notion of battering down the door might not be all madness. It was high time that he made use of his own wits.

"Is there no other way out of the building than into the street?" he asked. "Think hard, granther. My safety depends on it."

"Don't leave me, Willum, for I'll never set eyes on

you again. I be mortal old and brittle and nigh the last gasp."

"But I must hide from the press gang. Once I reach the quay I can shove off in a boat."

"And be seized by a king's cutter? Nay, nay, Willum, bide wi' me and defend yourself with the musket in yon corner. Better we die together."

Stephen felt unwilling to humor the piteous old codger to this extent. It was time for him to go. He moved to the door and slid back the bar, deaf to the broken entreaties of the grandsire. The dark passageway was quiet and empty. A farewell word of reassurance and the lad closed the door behind him. Groping, he bumped a stair railing and followed it upward, one rickety flight and then a landing. He had a vague hope of finding a scuttle and so crawling over the roofs. This was as sensible, at any rate, as being cooped up with the ancient lunatic and his musket.

The upper rooms were untenanted. Stephen collided with a door which was swinging half off the hinges. He could find no more stairs to climb. The attic could not be reached without a ladder. The mouldy silence was uncanny and disquieting. Stephen tiptoed over the rotten boards and felt along a rear wall until he came to a window shutter. A tug and it came away in his hands, hinges and all.

He leaned out and it was like wine to breathe the night air after this house of fetid darkness and decay.

A salt breeze gushed in his face. With a start he bethought himself of the Dutch galliot in the stream and her canvas hoisted to wait for a wind. The sky was clear and the stars were peeping out. Stephen gazed down at a narrow area-way between the houses, with an alley leading out of it. The buildings were huddled almost back to back.

Here was a safe exit, unseen from the street and the riot that raged near the ale-house. It was too long a drop from the window, however, and meant the risk of broken bones.

" Falling off one roof was a-plenty for to-day," muttered Stephen, " and I see no red-headed lieutenant to use for a cushion."

He ripped the shutter from another window, near a corner of the house, and leaned out as far as he dared. The Salem houses, he knew, had wooden water spouts leading to buried cisterns. Huzza, here was one of these spouts and he could touch an iron band that held it close to the building. It was a flimsy contrivance and he was no light-weight but he was in a mood to clutch at a straw.

Down from the window ledge he swung himself and kicked until he could wrap a leg over the wooden pipe. Then he let go and made a grab for it. The grip of his knees took hold and eased the swift descent until he could hook his fingers in an iron strap and dangle like a seaman on a yard. A fresh grip of the stout knees

and he slid again while the wooden spout creaked and swayed. Near the bottom it broke away from the fastenings. Stephen fell flat on his back across the rim of a brick cistern.

Horrified, he rolled to one side and was on solid ground, much rumpled and with splinters in his palms. With a thankful chuckle he said to himself:

"Twice to-day it has paid to be mother's fat boy. Ben Gerrish would have flunked that water pipe."

Out of the alley fled the battered young prisoner-of-war. A cautious detour and he found himself once more at the quay. He had lost the basket of cabbages but was still at large and escaped from the press gang. And he was determined to put Plymouth behind him if he had to swim for it. The night was too dark to see the sails of the Dutch galliot but a riding-light gleamed where he had last beheld her. The breeze drew steady from the land. If the galliot intended dropping down with the tide, there was no time to lose. She was the desperate chance, the forlorn hope.

There were no more fishermen on the beach. Stephen ran to a clumsy skiff and found oars under the thwarts. Shoving off, he paddled softly until well out in the fairway. Then he used both oars. No more wiles or subterfuges! His brain was benumbed. He was merely a terrified lad, half dead with fatigue, whose instincts urged him to flight. He would beseech the crew of the

galliot to give him passage. Failing this, they could toss him overboard for all he cared.

Doggedly he swung at the heavy oars. The skiff was sluggish and hard to steer. Glancing over his shoulder, the light of the galliot seemed to be no closer. He rowed again, until he had to pause and rest. Were the wind and tide setting him back? Was he making no progress whatever? The vessel's light was actually receding or else he was drifting sternward. He was employing the very last ounce of strength. Every stroke hurt him. Bruised and tired, he swayed back and forth in a kind of deadened drowsiness.

It was of no avail. He was chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, a Flying Dutchman of a galliot. Then it dawned on him that the vessel was under way, sailing out of Plymouth Sound with the breeze over her quarter. She must have hove anchor while he was dodging back to the quay. By just this much had he missed boarding her. The misadventure with the press gang and the sojourn in the room of the demented grandsire had wrecked his well-laid plan.

He drooped over the oar handles and was motionless for some time while the skiff floated with the ebbing tide. It was too great an effort to pull for the shore. And for what? To be hunted back to prison and locked in the Black Hole for weeks and weeks? And after that to suffer the dreary and hopeless ordeal of confinement with his seafaring countrymen?

Let the skiff drift out to sea. The sea might be more merciful than British soldiers or press gangs. At any rate, he, Stephen Claghorn, refused to pick up those heavy oars and row his heart out any more. He was done.

The two loaves of bread inside his shirt had been crumbled but he chewed a few fragments, striving to keep his eyes from closing tight. He was unutterably exhausted. He wept a little as he laid himself down on the bottom board with his head pillowed on his arm. The air was chill. He shivered but was awake no more than a few minutes.

The skiff rocked him gently as the mysterious impulse of the tide drew it out into the broad reach of the Sound and so to meet the sea.

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING MASTER BENJAMIN GERRISH

WHEN last seen, the schoolmaster of Salem had abandoned his job as a mason without giving notice. When last heard of, he had finished coasting down a tiled roof and was floundering in the shrubbery. He had not intended vanishing in this sensational manner. It was too much like leaving his young comrade in the lurch, with a red-headed naval lieutenant and a large pistol to complicate the affair.

Master Gerrish, however, was not accustomed to clinging to a chimney with one leg over the ridge. Excitement made him careless. His sudden departure therefore astonished him even more than it did his apprentice. Bouncing from the elastic branches of a laburnum tree, he wrecked a lilac bush and came to rest on the turf.

He did not remain there. Discovering that his long legs were still capable of motion, he loped around the front of the house, inside the hedge, and paused discreetly to reconnoitre.

He was eager to learn what had happened to Stephen. At the same time he was indisposed to offer

another target for that impulsive horse-pistol. He lacked even a trowel for a weapon. Craning his neck, he espied the insensible lieutenant stretched out on the gravel walk. It was a puzzling phenomenon.

The only other spectator was a scullery maid who had popped out of the kitchen door and gazed with her mouth open. Her nerves were so a-twitter that one glimpse of the stranger peering around the corner of the house was quite enough. She scurried inside and slammed the door.

Stephen Claghorn had disappeared. From the sounds in the house, an elderly woman tried to soothe the fairest rose of Devon who was shedding her petals in a fit of hysterics. The schoolmaster showed no tremors of panic. His eye lighted with intelligence. The grass seldom grew under his feet when something needed to be done, providing it was on dry land.

He strode to the side of the stricken lieutenant and rolled him over. From his back he whisked the handsome blue coat with the white facings and gold epaulets. Then he jerked off the long, polished boots which, at a guess, were large enough. Like lightning the boots and the three-cornered hat were rolled inside the uniform coat. Around the bundle was wrapped the mason's apron turned inside out. A sleight-of-hand artist had never made his fingers fly faster. As an afterthought the empty pistol was added to the plunder.

Tucking the bundle under his arm, the busy Benjamin

Gerrish looked this way and that. He had no idea whither his frightened apprentice had fled. It was every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. The schoolmaster chose the open road.

Skimming along inside the hedge, instead of bolting out through the gate, he undoubled himself for a quick survey over the top of this green barricade. Several neighbors were approaching at full speed but from the opposite direction. At the instant when they turned in at the gate, Master Gerrish dived through the hedge. Thus he safely vacated the hostile premises and was in the highway. The open country was his immediate and feverish destination. What he ardently desired was a secluded nook in which to tuck up over night. There, perchance, he might find respite to organize a campaign.

Plodding sturdily in the direction of the wooded hills, he passed safely out of the town and into muddy lanes that wandered between the fields of the small farms. A plowman in smock frock and leathern gaiters was turning the black earth in straight furrows. Two laborers were digging a ditch with mattock and spade. A boy in a turnip patch called to a lass who was driving sheep. This tranquil landscape seemed so remote from wars and alarms that the refugee with the bundle under his arm felt less impelled to go hurrying on.

Late in the afternoon, hunger conquered his fears. He ventured into a cottage dooryard where for a few pence he was regaled with a pitcher of milk, a plate of

oaten cakes, and a roll of sausage. The questions asked him were awkward to parry. It was apparent that these simple country folk eyed him with curiosity. He resolved to risk no more encounters of this sort. Another day and the king's men might be riding these very lanes with warnings to look sharp for American rebels escaped from the Old Mill Prison.

At length, Ben Gerrish came to a vast enclosure like a park, wooded with ancient oaks. Deer grazed in the grassy spaces and bright cock pheasants strutted out from a copse. This was the estate of the lord of the manor, conjectured the vagrant rebel, and in such a leafy park one could seek a hiding-place. He continued on outside the wall to give the gamekeeper's lodge a wide berth, and so followed the road almost a mile before climbing over.

A man might have found many a worse lodging for the night than among the dry leaves at the foot of one of these noble oaks which spread its limbs like a roof. The schoolmaster thought it the part of prudence to walk farther into the park, away from the highroad, to where the verdure was densest. The glades and meadows were to be avoided. Now and then he loitered or stood listening. His fancy was pleasantly beguiled. In such forest land as this had Robin Hood and his merry archers hunted the dappled deer.

So secure and sequestered did Ben Gerrish feel that it was a rude shock suddenly to behold two men steal

out of a patch of undergrowth and dodge from tree to tree. His own impulse was to take cover but these other men were not in pursuit of him. On the contrary, they were desperately anxious to make themselves scarce.

In the light that filtered through the trees, their aspect was oddly familiar, roughly dressed fellows in patched jackets and shabby breeches of a seafaring cut. One of them turned to glance back. Master Gerrish raised a loud holloa of:

"Comrades ahoy! Let go your anchor! Look who you are running away from."

The two men luffed up, as the saying is, and stood staring, all out of breath. Then they came trotting back to shake hands in a hilarious reunion. These were none other than Captain Silas Ropes, master of a Yankee privateer schooner, and Henry Holter, mate of a merchant ship out of Newburyport. They were the pair of prisoners who had crawled through the hole in the wall after Stephen Claghorn had been extracted by main strength, and the faithful schoolmaster had chosen to remain behind with him.

There was so much to be explained that the astounded Ben Gerrish and the two mariners were talking loudly all at once, forgetting caution, until Captain Silas Ropes interjected:

"Lord save us, you might think we were on my own poop deck instead of hiding away among these dashed

Tory savages. Do you want the gamekeepers on our backs?"

"Bung my eye," exclaimed the mate, a massive young man of few words. "This *is* peculiar, the three of us a-picnickin' together so casual like."

They laid a course for a thicket of undergrowth and snuggled down to compare notes. Captain Ropes was a sinewy, sun-dried man of middle age who had been the leader of the plot to tunnel through the prison wall. Now that he and the schoolmaster could put their heads together, the outlook was not so darkly disconsolate. They were not likely to let themselves be snared like rabbits.

"Henry Holter and I got clear away from the prison before any alarm was raised," explained the captain. "And you would ha' been out ahead of us, Ben, but for the comical plight of your Claghorn lad. When he stuck fast and had to be yanked stern foremost, you swore to stand by him. Did you change your mind and cast him adrift?"

"Not I," answered Master Gerrish. "We strolled out of the gate at noon to-day and then—well, 'tis a sprightly yarn but much like a nightmare. I tumbled off a house and young Steve was on t'other side and the fortune of war separated us. God knows what has befallen him. I cannot bear to dwell on that. Pray tell me what happened to you and Henry Holter."

"We were anxious to steer for salt water," explained

Silas Ropes, " but it was foolish to blunder about in the dark without any bearings so we turned inland and found this shelter at daybreak. 'Twas in my mind to push on again to-night and try to fetch some small seaport, away from Plymouth, where we might filch a boat. But without a chart of the coast and being all fuddled up among these country roads, it 'ud be a game of blind man's buff."

" It sounds silly to me," grunted Henry Holter, the mate. " What do we know about cruisin' among turnip patches and hay ricks? Can't heave a lead. Pile up on our beam ends, sure as guns."

" We can devise something better than that," said Ben Gerrish. " What about provender? Have you been fasting ——? "

" *Turnips!!!* " growled the mate, so violently that it sounded profane. " We got lost in a field of 'em and plucked all we could carry. Pig fodder! "

" You will eat acorns to-morrow, Henry, if we don't get under way," declared Captain Ropes.

" What's in the bundle, Ben? Grub? " hopefully demanded the mate.

" Alack, no, unless you are hungry enough to chew gold lace and calfskin boot tops. 'Tis some trumpery that I hastily removed from the Royal Navy. I may find some use for it if all this turmoil has not addled my poor brain."

Toughened and pickled in brine were the two Yankee

seafarers. They had suffered lack of food in shipwrecks under blazing skies. It was not for them to weaken, or seriously to whine, at this small taste of privation. When the night came on they joined Ben Gerrish in scraping the leaves together beneath a friendly oak and passed wakeful hours in debating this scheme and that.

In absent-minded spells the schoolmaster brooded over his lost chum, Stephen Claghorn, and the promise he had made to protect him. In all likelihood the lad had been recaptured by now. Was it not the part of duty and loyalty to rejoin him in the Old Mill Prison? But there was a higher duty which, in the final issue, swayed the staunch heart of Benjamin Gerrish. His supreme allegiance was to his flag and country. He was in duty bound to make every effort to regain his freedom in order to fight for them again.

His exploit of walking so boldly out of the prison yard in a mason's disguise had earned for him the admiration of Captain Silas Ropes who handsomely overlooked the fact that he was a landlubber.

"As crafty a prank as ever I heard of, Ben, and it took cold courage besides. I had a poor opinion of scholars until I crossed your hawse. You will have to invent another hoax, for I am jammed on a lee shore. And God gave this Henry Holter more muscle than wit."

"True enough," agreed the mate, "but I always stand by. What's the orders?"

By now Master Gerrish had the crude outline of a project ready to submit for discussion. They listened and approved. It was easy enough to pick flaws and find serious objections but beggars could not be choosers.

" When I delayed to rob the British lieutenant of his fine coat and boots," said Ben Gerrish, " it was a random impulse. What prompted it was my memory of that prison companion of ours who all but ran the gauntlet of the sentries in a soldier's red coat. Just what could be done with this naval officer's garb was beyond my understanding until we three met together in this strange fashion."

" It is well worth trying," exclaimed Captain Ropes. " Any port in a storm, and we are in no fix to be squeamish over the odds. In the morning we must rehearse the play."

" Stormy weather, but let her drive," said the mate.

CHAPTER XII

SILAS ROPES TAKES COMMAND

AFTER a night of fitful slumber they were early astir. The task was to make Master Gerrish resemble a lieutenant of the Royal Navy. The captain handily produced a needle and a hank of thread with which he mended the rents in the schoolmaster's breeches and stockings. The mate found a rusty razor in the lining of his jacket. He led the scholar to a brook. Cold water had to take the place of soap. The victim uttered dismal groans while his chin was scraped. It was also nicked. War was a tough business, said Henry Holter, and a man was fair lucky if he got no worse wounds than these.

The gold-laced coat was tried on. It proved to be rather short in the skirts and roomy in the shoulders but Silas Ropes remarked that he had seen more than one poor devil of a half-pay captain of the Royal Navy who looked as if he had drawn his clothes from the slop chest. With a sleeve torn from his shirt to wind about his neck as a stock, Master Gerrish was assuming a really gallant air. He pulled on the polished boots while Henry Holter clapped the cocked hat on his head.

"More swagger, you dog," exhorted Captain Ropes. "And be ready to damn any seaman that dares cock an eye at you. By Neptune, you'll do passing well, Ben, old Hunks. What about Henry and me?"

"Excellent! As dirty a pair of escaped vagabond rebels as e'er deserved the lash well waxed to make it bite. Scrubbing and mending would spoil it. You'll get no mercy from me."

The sun was well up when they were ready to climb over the wall of the park and take to the open road. The first halt was made when Lieutenant Benjamin Gerrish of the Royal Navy relieved the two mariners of their leather belts. These he used to bind and buckle each man's hands securely behind his back. In this plight the cruel captor drove them in front of him, Henry Holter grumbling that unless he could scratch his nose he would be ripe for mutiny.

They were walking in the direction of Plymouth Sound but had not yet fixed upon a destination.

"Plymouth or Devonport, which?" queried Ben Gerrish. "Or shall we pass through Stonehouse which lies betwixt them? The most audacious course will be most apt to win success. Three madmen together! What think you, Silas, as a man of the sea?"

"We'll take a sight from the next hill, Ben, and mark where the biggest man-of-war rides to her cable. That will be the *Thunderer* three-decker, Vice Admiral Digby's flag-ship. We must hold our helm straight on

that tack until we come close to the harbor. Then we shall have to take fresh counsel."

" If we are not catched by the heels before then," said the mate who was no foolish optimist.

What held their attention at the rise of the next hill was not the shipping in harbor but the sign-board of the Red Lion Inn. It was grievous to think of passing this wayside hostelry. Empty stomachs make timid men, quoth Master Gerrish. Here was a chance to discover whether their play-acting would pass muster. Into the yard of the inn he hustled his prisoners. Then he shouted for the landlord and ordered breakfast. It was promptly cooked and served at a table in the corner of the tap-room. The haughty lieutenant of the Royal Navy roughly told his prisoners to stand and wait until he was finished. They were then permitted to eat their fill after their wrists had been unbound. This alarmed the landlord's buxom wife who declared it was a frightful risk to take.

" They know I carry a pair of barkers with ounce balls in 'em," said the naval officer, tapping his coat. " Hardy rascals, these American rebels, and dangerous men to have at large. I was lucky enough to nab this pair while they were asleep in Lord Edgcumbe's park."

" Oh dear! 'Tis a mercy we were not murdered in our beds. A post rider brought the news last night that some of 'em had escaped out of the Old Mill Prison.

Fearful rogues they be to look at, sir, and I wonder how you durst capture 'em lone-handed."

" A trifling enterprise, my good woman, for an officer in His Majesty's service. What is the charge for this bountiful breakfast? "

" Not a penny, sir. We can sleep in peace without our throats cut, and the whole parish'll bless ye. Ugh, bind 'em tight and use your pistols if they turn vicious."

Playing their parts, the ferocious captives scowled and cursed as they were marched from the Red Lion Inn with their hands fast behind them. Once more on the highway, however, they stepped out right cheerfully, chins up, like true sailors ready for a fight or a frolic. They had decided to steer a course through Plymouth town, veering well away from the Old Mill Prison to seek the streets that led down toward the forts and the Citadel and the huge line-of-battle ship anchored abreast of them.

It was blazingly audacious but this was true of the whole performance. Salt water was the goal of their desire. When they entered the town, people stared curiously or ran beside them to ask questions. The naval lieutenant gruffly explained that these were two recaptured American prisoners. They had been identified as deserters from the Royal Navy. He was taking them on board of Admiral Digby's flag-ship for summary court-martial and punishment.

The wretched deserters were hooted and jeered. Boys threw stones and handfuls of mud at them. There was no serious trouble, however, until they approached the water-front and the haunts of sailormen. Then the unexpected occurred. With all their scheming, so clever and so bold, they had not dreamed of causing a riot of sympathy.

All along the harbor the news had spread of the press gang's cruel raid of the night before. The smouldering resentment needed only a spark to touch it off. So when these two pinioned seamen were discovered in charge of a lieutenant who had no squad of his bullies to protect him, the jack-tars and fishermen came boiling out of the taverns to settle the score. More dirty work, said they. A gold-laced swab of a lieutenant of the press gang and two honest mariners trussed like felons and lugged off to the *Thunderer!*

This unforeseen upheaval of circumstances dumfounded Master Benjamin Gerrish, A hard fist smote him behind the ear. A hearty kick from a sea-boot propelled him forward. He dodged a cudgel just as a dead cat was flung at his head. He saw two British sailors whip out their knives and cut the straps that bound the wrists of Captain Silas Ropes and Henry Holter. The air was filled with hearty shouts of:

" Run for it, my lads! Show a stern to this skimble-skamble lieutenant."

" We'll give him a proper dose. Away ye go. Make

your heels fly. Hurrah! You'll make a safe offing yet."

"Britons never shall be slaves! Blowed if the bloody press'll collar you two hearties!"

For Silas Ropes and Henry Holter there was nothing to do but leg it as hard as ever they could. To rush to the succor of their sorely beset comrade was to give the game away. Bewildered by this ridiculous turn of events, they scampered in the direction of salt water amid a farewell chorus of friendly cheers.

The distressed lieutenant of the Royal Navy had no brace of barkers with ounce balls in 'em to stand off an attack. His only weapon was the empty pistol which he had purloined from the fairest rose of Devon's unfortunate Arthur. He flourished the pistol in the faces of the angry mob of British seamen and they hesitated. But when the hammer snapped in the pan and there was no explosion, they laughed in huge derision and forthwith declared that they would make a holy wreck of him.

They reckoned not, however, with a pair of long and nimble legs. The infuriated schoolmaster wrenched himself free, charged with head down like a bull at a gate, and bowled over two men who blocked his path. With a flying start he bolted in pursuit of Captain Silas Ropes and Henry Holter. The British mariners streamed after him but ran clumsily, being more used to swaying decks. They soon fell behind. In truth, a

grayhound would have exerted itself to overtake Master Benjamin Gerrish. The fear of death rode him with sharpened spurs.

Moreover, these British tars knew the imprudence of harrying a lieutenant in uniform once he had escaped beyond their familiar taverns and alleys. Baiting him in the open was risky sport. Soon they dropped the chase to straggle back to their various amusements.

The two prisoners were still running. There was no alternative. This was what they were supposed to be doing. With immense relief they turned and caught a glimpse of the schoolmaster bowling along in their wake. Discreetly hiding behind the corner of a warehouse, to avoid a public reunion, they waited until their captor came scudding by. They grinned when they met him but he was in a parlous state of mind. He wheezed for breath. His head was spinning. His cheek bled from a cut. A painful lump was swelling behind his ear.

" The plan was to reach the harbor, Silas," he panted, " but what now? This rumpus has staggered me."

" We reached the harbor, didn't we, Ben? " cheerily exclaimed the Yankee shipmaster. " And a dashed sight faster than we expected. It was like running before a gale o' wind with everything set. Barring the need of a few repairs, you ought to thank the English seamen. They did us a good turn."

" They all but killed me," morosely muttered Ben Gerrish who was in no grateful mood. " Our purpose

was to find a boat by hook or crook. We can't stand here and argue. I am in no condition to be the victim of another uprising. And yonder is H. M. S. *Thunderer*. Some of her officers may be coming ashore at any moment. It would be out of the frying-pan into the fire for me."

"Well, this brisk set-to of yours has given me an idea, Ben," replied Silas Ropes, with a hopeful air. "Look yonder! A fishing-smack no more than a cable's length from shore. And no signs of life on board. Quick! Her small boat is beached just beyond those rocks."

"Yes, but her crew may be somewhere ashore, within sight, Silas. A craft of that bigness will carry half a dozen men."

"Every man to his trade," exclaimed the lean, competent Yankee skipper. "Here's where I take command, by Judas. If Henry and I row you off to the smack, Ben, that uniform of yours'll hold her own crew back from boarding her. They will smell a visit by an officer of the press gang in search of men. And they'll be precious anxious to stay hid ashore."

"Aye, they will that, Silas," said Henry Holter. "I'm standing by. Let's us hop into the smack and no more words about it."

They hastened to the shore and tumbled into the small boat. The lieutenant stood erect in the stern-sheets while the two men pulled at the oars. Presently they were clambering to the deck of the fishing-smack. The

lieutenant was careful to make himself a conspicuous figure, striding to and fro. Silas Ropes rummaged in the little cabin and found enough food and water for a voyage of some length. Then they conferred at their leisure. The gold braid and cocked hat of the naval lieutenant were very visible from shoreward.

" Making sail and standing out to sea in broad daylight is rash business," thoughtfully observed Captain Ropes, " but my notion is that it can be done."

" Shall we up anchor at once? " asked Ben Gerrish who was ready to take his orders from the master mariner.

" Nay, wait a while," was the cool reply. " We are safest where we be until later in the afternoon. Stroll about on deck, Ben, or dangle your shanks from the cabin roof. The sun winks grand on your gilt buttons. Not a blessed smacksman will dare to venture aboard."

" They're scared blind," grunted Henry Holter. " Better stick it out till near sundown, eh, Silas? "

It required dogged patience and steady nerves to gaze in idleness at the grim tiers of the *Thunderer's* guns and the cutters filled with bluejackets as they passed to and from the naval quay. Captain Ropes had his own reasons for timing the departure from Plymouth harbor. He felt reluctant to delay until after nightfall because he was unfamiliar with these inshore waters. The risk of stranding was too great. To slip away a little before sunset, however, would be to get clear of the reefs and

headlands. Then, with darkness coming on, the smack would be much more difficult to pursue.

Shortly after noon, a knot of fishermen gathered on the beach and emphasized their talk with earnest gestures. It was plain to read that they belonged in the smack and desired to rejoin her. Their small boat was missing and there were no eager volunteers to man another one. Finally a red-faced man with a hurricane voice and a fringe of sandy whiskers under his chin was heard to bawl to his comrades to go find him a boat. He was evidently the skipper of the smack.

After some wrangling and running about, he was rowed out to the flag-ship *Thunderer*. Uneasily the three Americans in the smack watched him stump up the side ladder and accost the marine at the gangway. There, apparently, he was halted and told to state his errand.

A prolonged wait and the skipper of the smack returned to his own boat in a most indignant frame of mind, shaking his fist at the *Thunderer* and all vice admirals of the Royal Navy.

"He was advised to go bag his head," chuckled Silas Ropes. "If one of His Majesty's lieutenants is aboard this blighted old smack, he is competent to attend to his own affairs. But they may think us worth looking at from the quarter-deck, Ben. With this lively breeze o' wind I won't tempt Providence too long."

"After Vice Admiral Sir Howard Digby awakes

from his daily nap, he may send a cutter over to investigate us, out of sheer curiosity," suggested Lieutenant Benjamin Gerrish.

" We had better chance it no later than four o'clock, Ben. If it comes to a chase, our only hope is to give 'em the slip in the dark."

When, at last, Captain Ropes gave the order to hoist the smack's square mainsail, all three men hauled away with a will. This signal of departure aroused the fishermen to action. It had not occurred to them that the troublesome lieutenant of the Royal Navy might run off with the smack. It was, indeed, a fishy performance. The beach buzzed like a hornet's nest. The irate skipper summoned his crew. No longer holding back, they crowded into a boat to row out and investigate.

By this time the mainsail was flapping in the wind and Henry Holter was setting a jib. The schoolmaster ran forward to cut the hempen cable with an axe. The smack was slowly forging ahead when the fishermen's boat bumped alongside.

" Sheer off, consarn ye," roared Captain Silas Ropes, forgetting the humble rôle of a British bluejacket and deserter. " Fend off, blast your eyes, or I'll split and gut you like codfish."

" Fetch him the axe, Ben," shouted Henry Holter from the tiller.

The smacksmen recoiled from these lunatics and shoved their boat away while their valiant skipper

was imploring them to climb on board. This was no Navy lieutenant, he shouted at them, but a thief and a pirate bent on stealing the smack. Yankee prisoners, by gurry, and the blankety admiral could ha' had 'em by now if he wasn't such a dod-ratted old block-head.

The oars splashed again, in frantic pursuit, but the smack was slipping along with a bellied mainsail and the muscular Henry Holter was climbing aloft to shake out a large topsail. The breeze was strong enough to ruffle the harbor with whitecaps.

The smacksmen abandoned the chase. It was already hopeless. They turned to row to the *Thunderer* as hard as they could drive. Captain Silas Ropes leaned against the tiller and squinted at a stone fort almost abreast, then at the few vessels anchored astern. There was a twinkle in his gray eye as he measured the odds. To feel a deck beneath his feet and to sniff the sea was worth a thousand perils. With a laugh he said:

"Before the watch officer sends a messenger and disturbs the post-captain—and an orderly finds the gunner and he pipes a crew—we'll be out of range of that ark of a *Thunderer,* my lads. And that sloop-of-war lies stern on to us, and she can't give us a broadside unless they warp her round."

"But the forts!" cried the excited schoolmaster. "Won't they blow us out of water?"

"Not until they get a signal. When you see one of

those wooden semaphores wigglin' its arms, look out for squalls."

The smack was a lively craft in such a boisterous breeze as this and Captain Ropes handled her like an old friend. In his boyhood years he had raced home in the fishing fleet from the Grand Banks and the Georges with decks awash. Patting the tiller, he hummed in a tuneless voice:

> "The first of April when we set sail,
> Blessed with a sweet and pleasant gale;
> For we were bound to New Barbary,
> With all our whole ship's Company."

"Jumping Jonah!" shouted Henry Holter. "Look astern, Silas. You will whistle another tune."

A large armed ketch came gliding out of the Catwater with everything spread. A bow gun boomed the alarm from the *Thunderer* and a string of bright signal flags soared to a yard. Captain Ropes waved a careless hand and bade his comrades watch the nearest fort. The smack had been sailing on a long slant to give these shore batteries as wide a berth as possible. When, at length, one of them banged away at her, the solid shot fell short or were poorly aimed. It was a small target and moving rapidly. And the artillerymen were taken by surprise.

"Short reaches now," commanded Silas Ropes. "Like a flea on a hot griddle. We'll make those stupid

gunners sweat at hauling their pieces to lay on the mark. As lubberly shooting as ever I saw, barring the great guns of a Spanish galleon."

"But that big ketch astern will be gaining while we fiddle about in short reaches," objected Ben Gerrish.

"Scholars and naval lieutenants'll belay their jaw-tackles," snapped Captain Ropes. "Am I right, Henry?"

"Right as new paint," agreed the mate. "Dodge the silly cannon balls. Then make a race of it."

The smack was leading the pursuit by the better part of a mile, and the daylight was fading. Unscathed she fled beyond harm from the guns ashore and filled away for the open sea. The armed ketch was the faster vessel. Ever and anon Captain Ropes glanced back or at the darkening sea and sky. He was in the best of spirits. This wild gamble with fortune was more to his taste than fretting his heart out in an English prison yard.

Finding nothing to do on deck, the practical Master Gerrish ducked into the cabin and made a fire in the little brick oven. Soon the smell of fried herring delighted the mate as he stood by the twanging shrouds and was ready to jump at a word from Silas Ropes. There was no display of excitement in the smack. Sink or swim, they had to put their trust in God and await the verdict. Ben Gerrish poked his head through the scuttle to say he was sorry for those honest fishermen of

Devon whose smack they had run away with, driven to it by their own necessities. Henry Holter scolded him for a soft-hearted sawney and told him to fetch supper on deck. A prize of war, chimed in Silas Ropes, and he wished to hear no more mushy nonsense.

It was a nervous supper as soon as the ketch drew near enough to open fire with a bow-chaser. However, she yawed wildly in the following sea and was wasting gunpowder. Methodically one round after another was fired, flashes of bright flame against the gathering darkness. With another hour of light, the ketch might have shot the smack to pieces.

But there came a moment when the dim shape of the pursuing vessel fairly dissolved from view, when the night so completely enshrouded her that her whereabouts could be fixed only by the flashes of the guns.

" If we can't see her, it stands to reason she can't see us," sensibly observed Silas Ropes. " Still firing at us out of cussed British spite! Aiming at the wide English Channel. Tacks and sheets, Henry. Hey, you Ben, lay hold. We'll play at hare-and-hounds."

The smack staggered and listed as she caught the wind abeam and went foaming on a new course. The ketch vanished from their ken. Captain Ropes announced that he would stand an all night watch. Henry Holter was sent below to snatch what sleep he could. Ben Gerrish sat hunched on deck and nodded drowsily, his thoughts sadly overcast at this final separation from

Stephen Claghorn. The only ray of consolation was that the dear lad was probably alive and well, even though it had been his unhappy fate to be returned to the Old Mill Prison.

While the schoolmaster was mourning that he had been unable to lift a hand to succor Stephen, the smack may have passed not far from a drifting skiff with the sea splashing over the gunwales, and crouching in the bottom a boy half-dead with exhaustion and cold and the pitiful torments of thirst.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY FALL AFOUL OF A HARD CASE

DAYBREAK found the runaway fishing-smack beyond sight of land and still steering seaward to avoid the traffic of the English Channel before making her way to the coast of France. Silas Ropes yearned to sail the smack home to America but his crew was short-handed and there was not food and water enough. In Brest or St. Malo they could find friends and perhaps a ship of their own flag. Master Gerrish discovered an old storm-coat of tarred canvas with which he was able to cover his shoulder-straps and gilt buttons. He had ceased to be a fiery lieutenant of the Royal Navy and was content to be a humble fisherman earning his bread upon the face of the waters.

There was every hope of going unmolested now that Plymouth was so far astern. A little craft like this would attract no more than a passing glance from a king's cruiser bound in or out of the Channel. The adventures in England began to seem unreal, fantastic, like a troubled dream. These three fugitives were in blithe spirits until afternoon when a vessel was observed to change her course as though desirous of speaking them.

This was so unexpected that they felt suddenly anxious. The smack was unable either to fight or to run away from this swift schooner which came sweeping down from the westward, presumably bound up Channel. That she carried more guns than a trading vessel of her tonnage was readily perceived by Captain Ropes who ventured the opinion that this was a small British privateer. There was no show of hostility when the schooner ran close and swung gracefully into the wind. Some twenty men lounged on deck while a slouchy officer shouted:

"The smack ahoy! Any fresh fish? We have chawed salt horse till we spit brine."

"No fish to spare," Captain Ropes called back. "We were blown offshore and now we're trying to work our way back."

This was all the excuse he could think of for being found so far at sea and on a course for France. It was a flimsy tale, as he knew, and he wished to part company as soon as possible. Closer inspection was not at all to his taste. The officer of the schooner turned to say something to a hulking man with an arm in a sling who reclined in a canvas chair. This person was presumably the master of the vessel. He heaved himself from the chair and lumbered to the rail where he stared hard at the smack.

After a long scrutiny, he sung out in a hoarse voice:

"Blown offshore? No signs o' foul weather to blow

ye this far. You belong in a Channel port? Three men? Where's the rest of your crew?"

"Lost 'em," barked Silas Ropes with a wistful glance at the schoolmaster whose inventive talent had failed him for once.

"Huh? You're steerin' the wrong course, with only three hands aboard. Where d'ye hail from?"

"Plymouth. My other men went adrift in a boat."

"Plymouth, my eye!" roared the unpleasant master of the schooner. "Devon ne'er bred your stripe o' fisher folk."

Captain Silas Ropes jammed his hands in his pockets and was dumb. It seemed to be an occasion when silence was golden. Stolid Henry Holter was heard to mutter:

"A kettle of fish and no mistake, Silas. Stand by!"

Master Benjamin Gerrish shook off his depression and the solemn face brightened. Crossing the deck, he talked earnestly to Silas Ropes who grinned and nodded. From the schooner came the hail:

"Stay as you be while I send a boat."

It was the second in command who boarded the smack a few minutes later. He was a sallow young man with a stubbled chin and a dirty shirt. For all his slovenly air, there was something alert and hard about him. His eye was keen and shrewd. A cynical, competent seafarer who had been battered about and knew a thing or two!

In Master Gerrish he found no longer a humble, frightened fisherman. His mien was dignified and superior as the visitor was invited into the cabin. There Ben Gerrish doffed the tarpaulin hat and threw open the canvas storm-coat to reveal the blue cloth and gold insignia of a lieutenant of His Majesty's Navy. The cynical young man was impressed but he sourly demanded explanations.

" Secret orders—a most confidential mission," he was curtly informed. " You will mention this only to the master of your ship."

" Secret orders and bound to France? " queried the British privateersman.

" I am not permitted to say more," answered Master Gerrish, with a severe frown. " You delay my voyage at your own peril."

" Overhauling you is a proper precaution in the king's service," retorted the other. " My schooner is commissioned to search or seize any suspected vessel or persons found on board. What's your name and where are the papers that prove you to be what you claim? My skipper will have to note it in the log for Admiralty inspection."

Where *were* the secret documents and credentials? This staggered the Yankee impostor who might have brazened it out with an enemy more credulous or stupid. The only document found in a flap pocket of the lieutenant's coat had been a list of seamen wanted for

desertion from His Majesty's men-of-war. However, he played the last card by exclaiming, in tones of haughty surprise:

"You doubt my word, the word of an officer and gentleman? Am I to show my documents to every Tom, Dick, and Harry who says he has a privateering commission? By Jove, I have a mind to report your own vessel for investigation. No doubt she deserves it. She appears to be filled with shabby vagabonds and cut-throats like yourself."

"Rant and blow all you like," rejoined the shabby vagabond, his temper unruffled by the insults. "Your story fits you no better than your coat, and that's as sure as my name's Dick Webb. Come along aboard the schooner and tell it to the old man. It'll make him laugh. Ever since a bullet splintered his elbow he has been uglier than the Old Scratch himself."

"What if I refuse to leave the smack?" cried the bogus lieutenant.

"Then my men will toss you into the boat, heels over head, my gay gull-catcher," snarled the officer of the schooner. "*You're a spy,* and I'll bet my last shilling of prize money on it."

Spy was a word to make the cold shivers chase along the spine of Master Benjamin Gerrish. Better had he clung to the disguise of a fisherman. He flinched and hesitated, turning to speak to Captain Silas Ropes whose expression was comically blank.

" In the boat, sharp now—the three of you," was the sharp command. " Abandon ship, d'ye hear? Let the smack go adrift."

" Merry England again," said Henry Holter under his breath. " A hard country to quit."

Glumly they piled into the boat and made the passage to the schooner, vanquished by sheer force of numbers. Immediately they discovered for themselves that the wounded man in the canvas chair was, indeed, as ugly as the devil himself. He was gaunt and grizzled. An old scar twisted his mouth at one corner. He listened to the report of Mate Dick Webb but his evil gaze was attentively scanning the lean, quizzical Silas Ropes, master mariner. This was odd, for the tale concerned the martial figure of Ben Gerrish in the naval officer's coat.

The wounded skipper seemed to be perplexed, like a man raking the dim recesses of his memory. His mood was softened for the moment but presently he roused himself and ripped out an oath as he told the mate to hold his clacking tongue.

" Stow the gab, Dick Webb, or I'll bash your head with a handspike. My own eyes tell me enough. This long zany in the blue coat has ne'er served in a king's ship. I watched him come over the rail, as clumsy as an old woman in a bumboat. Didn't I mark him climb to the wrong side of the quarter-deck? Any bantam midshipman knows better. And he failed to kick a sea-

man out of his path with a volley of handsome curses. An officer and gentleman! Then so is my grandmother's cat."

"He is a spy, then. I thought as much, sir," said the sour-visaged Dick Webb. "What shall I do with him?"

"A spy right enough. A Yankee spy, and caught in a British uniform. Do with him? Hang him to the foreyard. Tell the drummer to muster all hands for execution. Let the bos'n and four men tail on to the rope and swing him up briskly."

The mate, Dick Webb, looked quite pleased and was about to go forward when the wicked old skipper shouted at him:

"Make a holiday of it. Grog and plum-duff for all hands."

The mate smiled quite cheerily at this and halted to cast a sinister glance at Captain Silas Ropes and Henry Holter.

"What about this brace of gallows-birds?" he inquired. "Tarred with the same brush! There's plenty of room on the foreyard. Shall I turn 'em off at the same time?"

"No, we can stretch their necks to-morrow. With this infernal head wind it'll be a weary thrash to port and we need amusement."

The emotions of the three unfortunates froze them stiff. This ruffianly monster issued his orders as casu-

ally as though telling the cabin boy to fetch him his dinner. Benjamin Gerrish gulped and closed his eyes. Captain Silas Ropes moved his lips, not in prayer but in bitter, deep-sea curses. Henry Holter came out of his trance to lunge for a belaying-pin as a weapon but a naked cutlass stopped him.

Upon the forecastle head the drummer was beating the long roll, with extra flourishes and ruffles. A seaman swung himself into the foremast shrouds with a tackle block slung from his shoulder. The other men were grouping in the waist for the rare sport of seeing a rebel spy decorate the yard-arm.

Pulling himself together, Benjamin Gerrish stepped forward, his face as white as paper, and implored:

"You will grant me time to pen farewell letters? To put me to death without trial is a dreadful crime ——"

"I am rated a dreadful hard man," roared the master of the schooner, with a twisted grimace. "Never heard tell of Captain Enoch Crooke? That's me."

"Liberty or death," thundered Henry Holter. "Huzza for the United States of America, and perdition take the bloody king and all the knaves that serve him."

"Ho, Dick Webb, best stretch this noisy nuisance along with the spy in uniform," croaked Captain Enoch Crooke. "He won't keep till the morrow."

Captain Silas Ropes, tears guttering his weather-beaten cheeks, was shaking hands with his doomed com-

rades when Enoch Crooke hoisted his gaunt frame from the canvas chair. His crooked smile now relaxed in a smile that was actually mirthful. His eyes twinkled beneath their shaggy brows. He was almost human. The wretched captives mistook this changed demeanor for mockery of them until he cried out, with a great laugh:

" Dick Webb, you lousy dog, dismiss the men. 'Twas a jest of mine. Then make sail and put the vessel on her course afore I keel-haul ye."

Ben Gerrish felt his knees cripple under him. He was too weak to stand and so, with clasped hands, he knelt and said his thanks to God as was pious and seemly. He had endured much but this was the breaking strain. Captain Enoch Crooke, whose sense of humor was so very peculiar, addressed himself to Silas Ropes.

" You Yankee traitors have given me the first bit of jollity since my arm was splintered. You'll not hang but I did not let ye off because I turned soft. Not me! Were I the king, God bless him, I'd hang every mother's son of a rebel that is took prisoner, afloat or ashore. However, 'tis my notion that one good turn deserves another. When did ye last clap eyes on me, Captain Silas Ropes, you scrawny sculpin? "

" Never, thank heaven," was the fervent response. " This once is enough and to spare."

" At Pernambuco, it was," answered Enoch Crooke, with a rusty chuckle. " In the year of '71. I was blind

drunk ashore at night. A pack of rascals from a Spanish lugger did set an ambuscade to slit my gullet and filch my purse. It was a certain Yankee shipmaster, going sober to his brig, that did make lively play with dirk and pistol-butt and hauled me out alive. I bear this scarred lip in token of the frolic."

"Aye, it comes back to me now," said Silas Ropes. "I helped lug you to your cabin and dumped you into your bunk by the heels. But you were all blood and mire, and I never had a fair look at you. I sailed next day, as I recall it."

"Right! But my men told me who you were and I saw you on your deck when your brig sailed out past my vessel."

"What of it?" grumpily demanded the Yankee mariner. "You were a hard case then and a worse one now, Captain Enoch Crooke, by that pizen mug of yours."

"Haven't I spared ye the rope?" exclaimed the other, with the air of a man who had done a gracious favor. "A thankless swine of a rebel ye be. Ropes by name, hey? You were born to swing. What more d'ye expect of me?"

"Set us back aboard our smack, if there's a decent spark in your besotted carcass. Let us go free to sail where we please. I beg no favors but you have cast up a good turn I once did you. 'Twould ha' been plain piracy and murder to hang us, as you well know."

" I grant that this long black mummer in the Navy togs is no spy," conceded Enoch Crooke. " That was Dick Webb's fat-witted notion. What ye truly be is rogues of prisoners of war escaped out of Old Mill Prison in Plymouth town. 'Tis as plain as a pike-staff."

" And thereby entitled to be treated as such," hotly exclaimed Silas Ropes. " That scurvy jest of yours sticks in my craw, to threaten us with death as spies and outlaws."

" Tut, tut, an enemy found in the king's uniform is a spy by law and custom. And you be an accomplice, Silas Ropes. But for that matter in Pernambuco I'd hang you all and glad of the excuse."

Tired of this dialogue, stubborn Henry Holter broke in to say: " The silly old sot is drunk or daft, Silas."

" Be quiet, Henry," chided Captain Ropes. " Tell me true, Enoch Crooke, and waste no more words. What do you propose to do with us? "

" Take you back to Plymouth and clap you in prison, to be sure," answered the master of the privateer schooner. He beamed as though bestowing a gracious kindness. " And I'll say naught about the spy in uniform. Why, blast my soul, it 'ud be treason to His Majesty if I set ye free in yon fishing-smack."

" A better night's work if I had let your throat be cut in Pernambuco," disgustedly exclaimed the Yankee shipmaster. " Put us below and be done with it. The

sight of you offends me. By the eternal, your idea of a good turn would shame Captain Willum Kidd."

In his virtuous mood the grizzled old sinner could not be goaded into anger. With his twisted grin he said to Dick Webb:

"Lock 'em in the storeroom, aft. There's spare sails to sleep on. Ho, ye pampered rebels! What more can I do?"

Master Benjamin Gerrish awoke from a melancholy reverie to say: "It will warm the cockles of my heart to see Stephen Claghorn again. The thought of it wonderfully tempers this sad return to Plymouth."

CHAPTER XIV

"THIS IS AN AMERICAN FRIGATE, SIR"

A SMALL boat, even a fisherman's skiff, will sometimes drift for a long time in the open sea in spite of wind and weather. Forlornly floating out of Plymouth Sound with the night tide, Stephen Claghorn had been too drugged with sleep and weariness to care what might befall him. Even the spirit of youth, so splendidly hopeful and defiant, has to learn the bitterness of defeat.

It was at the break of dawn that the boy rubbed his eyes and discovered that he was not in a prison hammock when his knee banged against a thwart. Bewildered, he sat up and put a hand to an aching back. The only sound was the lap-lap of water, like little voices whispering to him out of an immense solitude. Their message was not friendly but sinister. He was frightened.

For some time he sat hunched in the bottom of the skiff and stared at the paling stars. There was no reason to bestir himself. Every muscle was stiff and sore. The damp wind made his teeth chatter. The discomfort served to arouse him. His mind became active.

He called himself a fool for embarking on such a wild voyage as this instead of rowing ashore after the Dutch galliot had sailed away from him.

However, crying over spilt milk had never been robust Stephen's habit. He gnawed a crust of bread and reflected that he was alive and out of prison. Exploring the skiff he found a firkin for bailing and a small sprit sail. This bit of canvas was of no present use because the wind still blew from the land but the heavy dew had wetted it and by chewing it he squeezed a trickle of moisture to wash down the bread crumbs.

When the sun came up he saw the coast no more than a few miles distant but the skiff was bearing away from it and driving out into the English Channel.

" In these crowded waters I am sure to be picked up before another night," the lad said to himself, " or with a shift of wind I can set this sprit and make some kind of landfall. In some little fishing port of Cornwall I might find good Christian folk to take pity on me."

Entertained by such sanguine fancies as these, hopeful young Stephen began to flatter himself that this lonely cruise was not so stupid after all. It was merely another gamble with fortune, as befitted a bold patriot. And this was really easier on the bones than falling from tiled roofs or sliding down rotten water pipes. There would be thumping yarns to tell the lads in Salem. He would make their eyes stick out. No more calling him " Fatty " Claghorn! " Dare-devil Steve," more likely!

By now he was so far out from the lee of the land that the seas were choppy and broken and the breeze whipped them into foam. Water was flying into the skiff. Stephen bailed with the firkin or used the oars to keep the boat out of the trough of it but the exertion exhausted him. Reluctantly he stepped the mast and stretched the little sprit-sail. To steady the boat and keep her free of water he must needs run before the wind which meant steering down Channel and out into the stormy Atlantic.

At this kind of seamanship he was no novice, having sailed his own dory in many a rough blow off Salem harbor. And he read the weather signs to mean that the sea would grow no worse. But it was a racking ordeal to cling to a steering oar, hour after hour, drenched and cold, and continually watch the skiff for fear she might drive her bows under and capsize. The boyish ardor had dimmed. Even a British prison offered shelter and food and rest.

All that day the little skiff went careering before the wind. There was no water to drink and only soggy bits of bread to eat. These were treasured like a miser with his gold. Stephen was faint and giddy, handling the steering oar with a sort of instinct, his head drooping, his eyes half closed. When a wave broke over the gunwale and set the floor awash, he stooped to scoop it out with the firkin. The approach of darkness appalled him. The night would be the end of it.

But his courage was hard to quench and the love of life compelled him to struggle as long as he could. Before dusk the wind lost its rude force and the sea was less confused. It was still perilous for a skiff but Stephen lowered sail and tried the expedient of a sea anchor. Lashing the oars and mast together, he wrapped the canvas around them and secured this unwieldy bundle to one end of the sheet rope. Letting it pay out, he tied the other end to a ring-bolt in the bow. Floating as a drag, the contrivance pulled the boat around to ride head on to the seas.

Satisfied that he ran no great risk of drowning during the night, Stephen tumbled into the bottom to drowse by fits and starts. He was not yet frantic for fresh water but his tongue felt too big for his mouth and when he swallowed, it was like having a red-hot poker rammed down his throat. Prison life had sapped his normal vigor and he was the more apt to break under hardships such as these.

Before morning the gray Channel fog came rolling down to envelop the skiff in a dripping blanket. Stephen awoke to find the stars blotted out and the air thick with pearly vapor. He would be denied all hope of rescue until this fog should blow away. Sometimes it shrouded these waters for several days on end. It smothered all sense of direction. There was nothing to steer by, neither the coast nor the sun nor the north star.

The morning came sad and gray. The sea was visible

only a few yards away. There was no break in the curtain of fog. Stephen made no effort to use sail or oars. He sat on a thwart, his chin in his hands, and felt only one desire, that the fog might turn to rain so that he might catch a little in the firkin, enough to wet his salty lips and ease his aching throat. The pangs of hunger did not hurt as much as this.

The skiff wallowed in the swell while the hours passed ever so slowly. Once the castaway heard a horn blow quite near, and the slatting of canvas, and sailors shouting. He tried to yell but his voice was feeble and he went unheard and unseen by this near-by vessel. Yes, he would have welcomed the sight of an English ship, staunch young rebel though he was.

A long, long interval of misery and again he thought his ear had caught the sounds of a vessel in motion. Faintly through the fog came these familiar sounds, the swash of breaking water, the creak-creaking of spars, the trill of a boatswain's pipe. Stephen scrambled to his feet and stood intent, nerves taut as fiddle-strings, while the invisible ship moved nearer in the light air.

Presently he discerned an arching bowsprit and the blurred image of a figurehead poised above the tall cutwater. With an oar over the stern of the skiff he had strength to scull into the path of the oncoming vessel. In the fog he would be undiscovered unless he could get close alongside.

He was about to cry out with what voice he could

muster when a succession of louder sounds, sudden, abrupt, startled him. These were thrillingly familiar, oaken gun-ports swinging on their great hinges, the clang of iron-shod rammers, the rattle of handspikes. The ship was ready for action.

But what ship? Stephen was immensely perplexed. These warlike sounds came not from the vague shape of the vessel which loomed almost above his head, but from somewhere beyond and abreast of her. Were two ships wrapped in this fog? The mystified lad let the skiff drift. His dazed wits were all askew. Was it a choice between friend and foe, and which was which?

The bow of the nearest ship, which almost overhung him, forged slowly past. He heard commands called out and men running in haste to their stations. They had been caught unready. The skiff floated as far as the stern of this ship where Stephen caught sight of a small boat trailing from a line belayed to the taffrail. He sculled close enough to grasp the line, deciding that he had best snatch at this chance of salvation. From the quarter-deck he heard a strong voice shout through a trumpet:

"This is His Majesty's sloop-of-war *Vixen*. What ship is that? Answer or I shall fire into you."

Desperate as was the need of rescue, Stephen let go the line astern as if the touch had scorched him. On second thought he clutched for it again and held fast while he waited for the response to the challenge in

the fog. And now he saw another ship come surging through the blinding vapor, the hull obscured but the tall sails lifting in nebulous glimpses. There was a brief delay and then the answer came, calm, deliberate, but vibrant like a bell:

"This is an American frigate, sir. Strike your colors or I'll sink you with a broadside. Blow your matches, boys."

This response appeared to astonish the king's ship. It was ever so much more than her commander had bargained for. A silence ensued before the orders were bawled along the *Vixen's* decks, to trim sail, to bring the guns to bear. During this brief respite a frenzied lad in a fisherman's skiff was rocking at the oars, pulling for dear life between the two ships, in the last gasp of exertion. His goal was the deck of the American frigate.

The British seamen at the guns of the *Vixen* were the first to espy him and knew not what to make of it. He could not be explained. In some uncanny fashion this apparition of a skiff seemed to be fleeing from their own ship.

Expecting to be blown out of water, Stephen was still struggling to reach the blessed haven of the Yankee man-of-war when her ports erupted in the flame and smoke of a broadside. The deafening concussion knocked the lad flat in his boat and bits of burning wadding dropped around him. He had believed himself to be near dead with exhaustion but this was an error.

Like the invalid who springs out of bed when an earthquake rocks the house, he was suddenly cured.

With a yelp of terror he bounded up and pulled the skiff toward the stern of the American ship, dreading to hear the crash of the enemy's guns. Caught between two fires was a mild word for it. Let one cannon be aimed a trifle too low and he would vanish in a cloud of spray and splinters.

Out of the fog emerged Stephen Claghorn to astonish the Yankee crew, in its turn. Pausing to wave an arm in earnest appeal, he laid back on the oars again and drove the skiff under the ship's counter where he hung fast to one of the rudder chains. Here he found a refuge and a breathing spell. From the sight of those on deck he had vanished as strangely as he had come. But they had no time to investigate the phenomenon. And so Stephen moored the skiff to the rudder chain with a bit of rope and flopped over to rest.

By now the British sloop-of-war was firing furiously. The reeking smoke blended with the fog to conceal the antagonists from each other. They were banging away at random for lack of a target. A few minutes and the din of cannonading slackened, then ceased. The skiff swirled in the eddies which gurgled past the huge rudder post and Stephen realized that the American ship was moving with increased headway.

He would have been undiscovered if a farewell British round shot had not lodged plump in the stern timbers

a few feet above his head. A carpenter's mate lowered himself in the bight of a rope to inspect the damage. He saw the little boat snuggled close to the rudder and made the singular fact known to the quarter-deck.

Stephen could not have told how they hoisted him aboard. His next clear impression was of being wrapped in blankets and having hot drink poured down his throat. Tingling to his very toes, he perceived that he was in a bunk of a large and comfortable cabin. A man of serene and kindly features was smiling down at him, a man whom Stephen had known all his life. It was like a pleasant dream of home.

"Is—it—is it really you, Captain Jonathan Haraden?" huskily muttered the lad in the bunk. "My father's old friend and our dear neighbor?"

"Jonathan Haraden it is," answered the Salem shipmaster. "And you are Polly Claghorn's big boy, although somewhat shrunk in size."

"And you command an American frigate, sir? Has our country put them afloat as soon as this?"

"Would that it were true, Steve," was the answer. "That was a trick of mine to startle the Britisher. I blundered into him in the fog, and he carried too many guns for close quarters. After my hail he seemed as anxious to melt away in the fog as I was. Do you feel strong enough to talk, my boy? We'll breakfast together presently."

"Breakfast, Captain Haraden? Is this to-morrow

or yesterday? I was hauled aboard your ship in the afternoon."

"Aye, Steve, and you swallowed soup and brandy and then logged fourteen hours' sleep. This vessel is steering into the Bay of Biscay with a fine breeze and bright weather."

"Heigh ho, I must get on deck," cried Stephen in lustier accents, "but, ouch, I am all warped and kinked."

"And bruised besides," said Captain Haraden, with fatherly affection. "You are docked for repairs. Adrift in a cockle-shell of a boat. Where are the rest of them? I mean the crew of your ship. She was wrecked, I take it. You sailed with Spencer Colt in his brig *Atlantic.*"

"That was a million years ago," sighed Stephen. "Spencer Colt struck his colors to a Liverpool privateer that was no more than a fair match for him. He is in prison with his men. Ben Gerrish and I escaped but lost each other in Plymouth. A queer tale, all topsy turvy, and it can be told after breakfast."

Jonathan Haraden smiled in his grave, unhurried manner and took a turn across the cabin. He was dressed like a seaman, rough pea-jacket, oilskin trousers stuffed into top-boots, a sou-wester for a hat, but he could be mistaken for nothing else than a commander of men. Those who possess the high qualities of leadership never have to proclaim it with a swagger.

This calm and gracious dignity of face and carriage reminded Stephen of General George Washington whom the lad had heard address the officers of the Continental army in Cambridge town. Stephen's admiration was not misplaced. After all his mishaps and miseries it was his shining fortune to be shipmates with this Captain Jonathan Haraden whose career as a fighting seaman was to be second only to that of John Paul Jones in the maritime annals of the Revolution. Historians are mostly landsmen. Perhaps this is why they have overlooked this splendid privateersman whose deeds any navy would have been proud to claim. He it was who captured one thousand British cannon on the high seas.

Still pacing the cabin of his ship, Captain Haraden said, as if thinking aloud:

"Poor Spencer Colt! Pride goeth before a fall. He would take the disaster hard—losing his ship, stripped of his finery—and, worst of all, forfeiting the respect of his crew."

"My dear mother thought him a hero," sighed Stephen. "And have you seen her since I sailed, sir? And was she well? I have had no chance to send her any word at all."

"As lovely as ever, Steve, but pining for you. Hoping for news of victories and a brave return. Well, we shall pray to give you a more fortunate cruise in this *General Pickering* privateer of mine, if the enemy does

not scupper us. Only sixteen guns and fifty men and boys but luck has been with us thus far."

"Have you been cruising in the Channel, Captain Haraden?"

"Off and on, hoping to snatch a fat prize out of a convoy. But they huddle too close, with the men-of-war guarding 'em like mastiffs and no stiff gales to scatter the flock. We shall try a long slant to the south'ard, as far as the coast of Spain."

They had breakfast together with Stephen tucked in a big armchair, and he acquired a new dignity of his own in relating his adventures as man to man. Both touched and amused, Captain Haraden paid him a compliment by remarking that the ship had gained an able seaman.

"I was afraid you would rate me as a boy, sir," said Stephen, "and sign me on as such. You see—well, Captain Spencer Colt favored me because—er—it is a delicate matter, although everybody is aware of it in Salem—he has been seen going to our house so often—and you can't call it a secret ——"

"You earned all you got from Spencer Colt," bluntly declared Jonathan Haraden. "Your father was a second mate at seventeen and had his own ship at twenty. 'Twas only the other day, it seems, that I was chasing you off my ship at Derby Wharf, a roly-poly urchin always under foot. Well, as soon as you feel fit to turn to, you can find a hammock and report to the chief

gunner. You are welcome to sail as a guest, but it will make you unhappy. No young Claghorn was ever a shirker."

Stephen beamed and laughed and was quite like himself. Before night he had found his way to the waist of the ship, too shaky for duty but anxious to look for Salem friends and acquaintances among the crew. And lo and behold, here was young Jerry McNabb, tough as whip-cord and pugnacious as a terrier, who had punched Stephen's head times without number. Theirs had been a chronic feud of boyhood, Stephen always undaunted and renewing the fray but too clumsy to withstand the nimble McNabb. For once they shook hands and the greetings ran:

"Hullo, Jerry! And I thought I was clear of bad luck. Who let you on board? Stowed away?"

"Hullo, Steve Claghorn, I didn't sneak over the side in a fog. What have you done to yourself? You don't look like a tub of lard at all."

"Call me that a week from now and I'll black your eye, Jerry."

"And get a whale of a licking same as usual," scoffed the untamed McNabb. "Sit down on a gun-carriage and let me hear your lies."

Stephen was too keenly interested in the ship to talk about himself. He plied young Jerry with eager questions. What engagements had they fought? Was it a good crew? Did they feel confidence in Captain Hara-

den? At this Jerry doubled his fists as if insulted and threatened to chastise the upstart then and there.

Why, here was the kind of man he was, this easy-spoken, pleasant skipper of theirs! Early in this same cruise, while off the New England coast, they had sighted three armed ships sailing in company, merchantmen from Halifax to New York as it turned out. A squadron, said Jerry, a ship of sixteen guns, a brig of fourteen guns, and a sloop of twelve guns.

They exchanged signals and formed in line to give battle. Did Jonathan Haraden run from them? No, by gravy, though some of the men expected him to. He made a little speech from the poop and told them that if they did their duty he would speedily capture the three vessels. And this he did with great ease by going alongside them one after the other.

"Glory!" cried Stephen. "How could he do that?"

"Sailed around 'em and betwixt 'em," proudly explained Jerry McNabb. "He handled this *General Pickering* so as to make each one of 'em fight a single ship action. Hammered away or hauled off, as seemed best, and watched the chance to run close and knock 'em groggy with a final punch. Then we sent the three prizes in and went back to Salem ourselves to refit and get more men. And away we went to sea again."

"That's what they call strategy, Jerry."

"Brains, Steve, which is something you know of by hearsay. Take this *Vixen* sloop-of-war that we almost

fouled in that vile Channel fog. There was men of us grumblin' that Captain Haraden didn't clinch with her, big as she was and jammed full of men. All he had to do was crook his thumb at us and we'd ha' romped into it. But he knew he couldn't manœuvre blindfolded, and he lacked the guns to settle it like two bulldogs at each other's throats."

Other seamen drew near to greet the Claghorn lad from Salem and to ask for news of old friends and shipmates in the war prison at Plymouth. They made a hero of him but he laughed it off and begged them to tell him more about the ship and her master. What vividly impressed him was the untroubled temper of the whole company. They obeyed without grumbling. Brutal treatment had not been employed to cow them. It was like a family ruled by a just yet merciful parent.

And their faith in him was something superb. This *General Pickering* was a small vessel, even in that era of great hearts in little ships. Of two hundred tons burden, she was not as large as a drudging coasting schooner of to-day, and yet these sea-rovers of Salem had been ranging the English Channel in defiance of the enemy's towering squadrons.

" If he looks at a sail through his glass and tells the helmsmen to steer for her," the boatswain told Stephen, " we don't have no worries whatever. He don't fret, so why should we? The hotter the action the calmer he stands and says what's to be done. And these hearties

do it on the run. No floggin' 'em to their stations, not in this lively packet."

Three days Stephen idled as a passenger in the captain's cabin and then begged to be assigned to duty. He was not yet quite strong enough to work aloft or to heave at the gun tackles and so he busied himself at the everlasting task of keeping a ship clean and taut and was as happy as a lark. It was stormy weather in the wild Bay of Biscay and the *General Pickering* wallowed under reefed topsails with her decks flooded. But she was steadily working to the southward, out of the gales and fogs.

There came, at length, a day of sunshine with a breeze as soft as springtime. The men pattered about in bare feet and hung their mildewed clothing in the rigging to dry. Some of them paused to gaze at a distant sail or to glance at the quarter-deck. Placidly Captain Haraden paced to and fro, chatting with his first officer. He took the spy-glass from the rack. The distant ship was on a course to approach the privateer. There was no need of spreading more canvas in chase.

" She looms tall and shows no fear of us," said Captain Haraden. " A frigate, perhaps. We shall soon find out. Call the men to quarters."

Stephen Claghorn felt uneasy and tried to hide it. It seemed ridiculous not to turn in flight before they came closer. Frigate or not, this formidable stranger was at least thrice the size of the *General Pickering*.

Stephen was glowering at the stately ship which seemed to regard the small privateer with disdain, when Jerry McNabb sauntered up to say:

"The old man went below just now to shift into his fine blue coat and white breeches. He always dresses himself like a gentleman if he intends to engage the enemy."

"He means to fight yonder big bruiser of a ship, Jerry?"

"Aye, and take her, Steve. You'll learn what privateerin' is afore the sun goes down."

CHAPTER XV

HOW CAPTAIN HARADEN FOUGHT HIS SHIP

FIFTY Salem men and boys, they stood in groups and passed the careless jest while the decks rolled gently and the sweet air sighed aloft. It may have occurred to them that their little ship was attempting too much but they showed no alarm. A man could die only once and there was no better way to go to glory than along with Captain Jonathan Haraden. If he chose to fight the tallest man-of-war afloat, that was his affair. They would lay the guns on the mark and burn the powder for him.

After a while he strolled down amongst them, very neat in his fresh clothes, and halted to say:

" I have made her out to be an East Indiaman, boys. A richer prize than you dreamed of taking this whole voyage."

" She still looks to me like a frigate, sir," spoke up a veteran seaman.

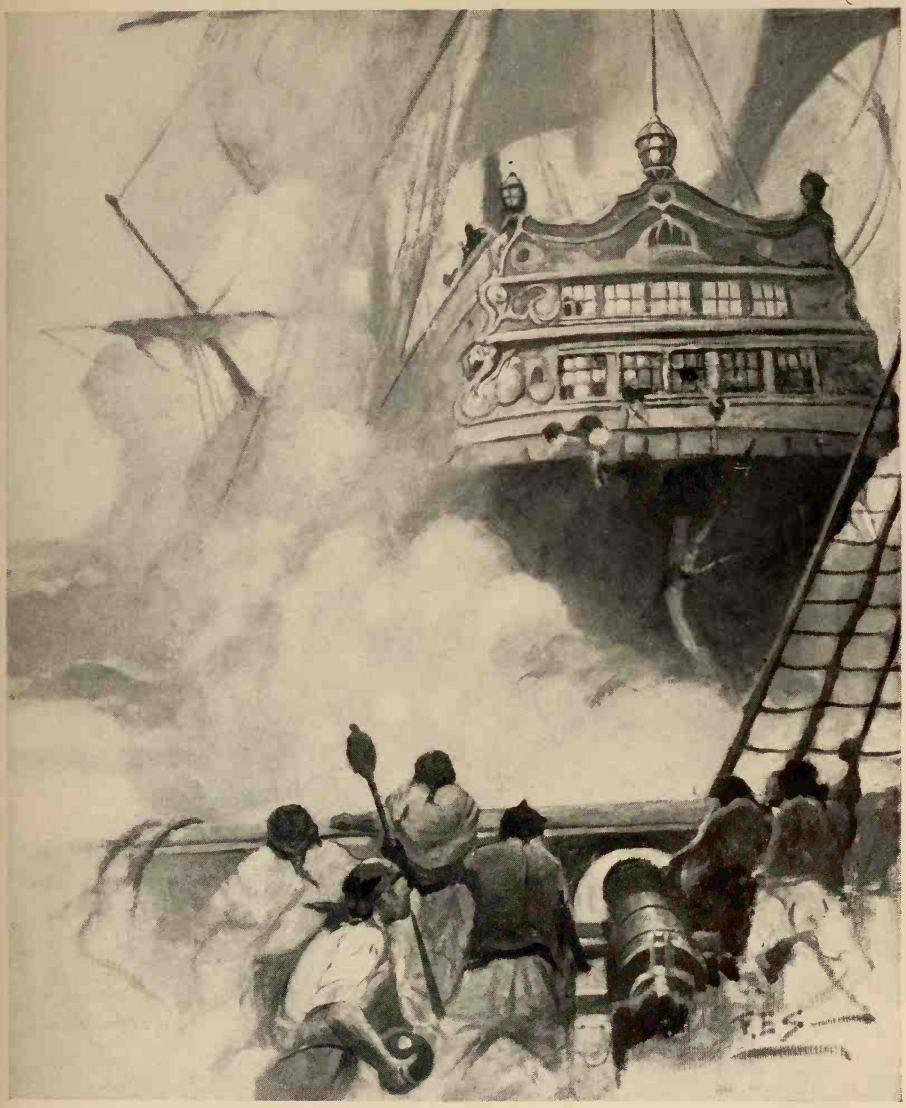
" No wonder, my man," was the tranquil reply. " A thousand tons burden, at the least. They are the most powerful ships afloat, in men and guns, outside the Royal Navy."

" Captain, if you please, sir, may I have a caddy o' China tea and a bolt of India silk out of that lumpin' ark? 'Twould tickle my old woman."

" Go help yourself, Tom," said the captain, with one of his slow smiles. He moved on to inspect the battery and told the gunners to waste no ammunition. They would have a huge target and there was no excuse for missing it. Then at the same leisurely gait he climbed to the quarter-deck and folded his arms to resume a vigilant survey of the noble East Indiaman which was, indeed, a rare sea picture.

Few of the Salem crew had ever beheld such a ship as this. She typified the power and riches of the Honorable East India Company which had created a vast empire of its own. Massive was the word to describe this ship that came lumbering across the blue ocean at three or four knots' speed. The white bands glistening along her side showed that she carried guns on two decks. The hull rose high from the water and was ornamented with gilt work and paint which sparkled in the sun. So heavy were the masts and spars that they looked clumsy. Compared with the Yankee privateer she was colossal.

Captain Haraden gave no more orders until the ships were a half mile apart. Then the *General Pickering* turned and ran in the same direction as the East Indiaman which condescended to pay not the slightest notice. A long pennant floated from one masthead, the Company's square house flag from another. This was to



THE PRIVATEER PASSED ASTERN AND POURED A BROADSIDE INTO THE SQUARE WINDOWS

announce who and what she was. Let insignificant strangers beware of molesting her.

The privateer now flung her own ensign to the breeze and steered a little closer. The *Pickering,* riding deep with ballast to bring her to the best sailing trim, was the faster ship by two knots to one. Half a gale of wind would have been required to quicken the sluggish gait of the Indiaman.

Every American seaman who could be spared from the guns was sent to the braces or into the tops to handle sail. The privateer tacked and swept toward the Indiaman but passed astern and poured a broadside into the carven woodwork, the ornate gallery, the square windows. Not a gun could be brought into action against such a swift blow as this.

It was Captain Haraden's hope to avoid the punishment of a direct cannonading. To stand and take it would crumple his ship like an egg-shell. In this ocean prize ring he was the light-weight boxer pitted against a slower, heavier foeman.

Going wide of the ponderous Indiaman, the agile *Pickering* gathered speed and turned again, this time to sail athwart the enemy's bows and repeat the dose of round shot and grape. To be raked fore and aft in this audacious manner was bitter medicine for the proud East Indiaman. Deliberately she shortened sail and swung to present a broadside to the insolent Yankee. The tiers of cannon thundered with terrific detonation but there

was much more noise than damage. Only the largest guns found the range and they fired high, over the low hull of the *Pickering,* smashing a few light spars. This was the beginning of a duel which was fought until after the sun went down. With the greater speed and handiness, the *Pickering* was able to tack and fill past bow or stern and deliver her smashing blows. Once or twice she closed in and fired fairly into the British gun-ports, but the musketry volleys from the lofty decks were so cruel that the cost was dear.

Toiling at a gun, Stephen Claghorn heard a sob of agony and turned to catch young Jerry McNabb in his arms. A musket ball had struck him in the breast. The wound was mortal. Stephen laid him down, with a hawser for a pillow. The two-fisted terror of youthful Salem was a warrior to the end.

"*You* couldn't do it—stretch me flat like this," Jerry murmured with a faint grin. "Got the number of my mess, did they? Jonathan Haraden'll make 'em pay for it. I—I reckoned on seeing this prize pull down her bloody red ensign. Jump to your gun, Steve—don't bother with me. I'm done for."

"Good-bye, Jerry," said his shipmate. "I will ram home a double-shotted charge to pay your score."

The breeze was setting the two ships in toward the coast of Spain. A misty mountain range was visible. By sunset they were only a few miles off the river which makes into the harbor of Bilbao. Whenever the India-

man endeavored to resume her homeward bound course to England, or to work offshore, Captain Haraden sent his ship ahead of her and raked her again and again.

With the failing light the privateer grew bolder. She was small and hard to hit while the enemy loomed like a grim fortress. Four mortal hours had they fought each other and the issue was undecided.

The East Indiaman was crippled but unconquered. Her rudder had been disabled and streams of water gushed from the scuppers to show that the pumps had been manned. The bowsprit hung like a broken tree. The head-sails trailed overside. Before the handsome scroll work on her stern had been smashed, the Americans had read the ship's name, "*Ganges of London.*"

The wind had gone down with the sun. It merely rippled the lustrous ocean. So slowly did it fan the privateer along that Captain Haraden feared a dead calm which might leave him too near the enemy's guns. He told his crew to cease firing. For once he heard them complain. They swore like mutineers but he blandly explained that it was time for supper and a night's respite. They would resume the engagement in the morning and he looked forward to a happy conclusion. Whereupon they yelled approval and joyously mobbed the ship's cooks.

There was not much sleep on board of the *General Pickering*. Strange to relate, only four men had been killed and seven wounded. Musketry fire and flying

splinters had hit most of these. The little ship had been so adroitly sailed and manœuvred that she could be made ready overnight to play the game again. And so they mended spars and rigging and cleared away the debris.

Stephen Claghorn stood a late watch at the door of the captain's cabin. After a final turn on deck, Jonathan Haraden came below and removed his coat and boots. Beckoning the boyish orderly, he said:

"Come in, Steve, my lad. You ought to be in your hammock. I am told you did well in to-day's affair."

"I helped pop at the old tea-wagon, sir. We will take her in the morning, won't we, sir?"

"I think so. But it will be tough work. The first officer is to let me know if the wind comes up during the night. Otherwise I am not to be disturbed."

At the end of his watch, Stephen went on deck to spread the news that the captain was sound asleep. This was hailed as an excellent omen. It braced the spirits of tired men to whom the odds seemed almost hopeless, now that the heat of battle had cooled. If the captain could snore, they felt easy enough to snatch forty winks themselves.

Some of them stared at the dark bulk of the East Indiaman, so massive and forbidding in the starlight. Lanterns twinkled on her decks or gleamed through the open ports. In the quiet air the voices of the British

sailors could be heard, and the blows of hammer and axe.

At dawn the breeze revived. Slowly the crippled *Ganges* drifted toward the headlands of Bilbao Bay. The shattered rudder post had been braced with ropes and spars. The ship steered after a fashion but was unable to work offshore with the wind blowing from the wrong direction. The crew of the privateer watched her go sagging off to leeward and wondered if Captain Haraden intended to wait and let her strand on the rocks. The truth was that he had no idea of losing his prize or confessing himself beaten off.

He carefully studied the enemy ship while the *Pickering* loosened the sails which had been furled for the night. He was freshly shaven and carefully attired, not foppishly but as befitted an officer of his rank. Anxiety may have been in his heart but it did not cloud his brow. His speech was quiet and courteous but those around him could feel the intensity of purpose. He was as hard and cold as steel. Adversity might break but it could not bend him.

The seamen were ordered to drag six of the guns across the deck and make them fast. This concentrated the battery on one side of the ship and almost doubled the weight of metal in a broadside. There was to be no more sailing around the Indiaman and using the advantage of speed. Such tactics had served to maul and disable her but they could not compel surrender.

With the *Pickering* ready to join battle, the Yankee crew was piped to quarters. To their amazement the people of Bilbao were flocking down to the headlands and beaches, thousands and thousands of them. They came on foot and in carriages, or riding mules and horses. There seemed to be no end of them. The bay was alive with craft of every description, Spanish luggers and feluccas, pinnaces and cutters, all under sail and crowding for the entrance of the bay.

And still they came, fishermen spreading red lateen sails, oars flashing from small boats, barges rowed by sailors of the Spanish navy. Bilbao was swarming pell-mell to witness the thrilling spectacle. It was far better than a bull-fight.

A brave sight it was for a holiday! A great ship of England, the ancient enemy of Spain, attacked by a little Yankee privateer of a gallantry incredible!

With her yards squared the audacious *Pickering* came up astern of the Indiaman but instead of veering off was seen to move straight ahead to run close alongside. It looked as if the ships were about to be interlocked, muzzle to muzzle. This would have been to invite disaster, for the British sailors could have swarmed through the ports and carried the privateer by boarding. Captain Haraden was not as stupidly rash as all this. He stood close to the two helmsmen, conning the *Pickering* himself.

The two ships were side by side, no more than a few

yards apart, the privateer very deftly guided to avoid collision. So close did she run that the upper tier of the enemy's guns could not be depressed to do her harm. And as Captain Haraden had suspected, even the lower tier of guns was higher from the water than his own deck. In short, his chance of success in this desperate manœuvre was in the fact that his ship was so much smaller than the other.

The Englishmen assumed that these ferocious devils of Yankees were about to try to finish it with cutlasses and pikes. What else could it mean than a boarding party? But instead of a hand-to-hand conflict, the privateer delivered a smashing broadside of fourteen guns. Every ball had an extra charge of power behind it.

Strongly built though she was, the *Ganges* had been many years afloat. Her planking and timbers were brittle with age. The hurricane of iron missiles from those fourteen guns tore her side open. It gored her as though the sea had flung her upon some granite reef. The rending shock of it was like an explosion between decks. The British gunners were flung this way and that. Only a few of them in the lower tier were able to reload and fire.

The privateer moved forward and slowly passed out of danger. She lacked a mizzen topmast and the sails were riddled but the hull was sound. And there were men enough left on their feet to fight another round. It seemed like a miracle that the little ship could have

escaped from the inferno of thunder and flame. With a like skill and courage, however, had Drake and Howard and Richard Grenville pounded and smashed the great galleons of Spain in days gone by. The sedate Salem shipmaster, Jonathan Haraden, was bred of this same stout English stock and in his soul, also, was the fire of seafaring genius.

The battered *Pickering* stood away, into the mouth of the bay. She was about to return to the attack when a blackened scamp of a powder boy scampered to the quarter-deck and panted to the captain:

" Please, sir, the chief gunner bids me tell you there is only one more charge."

" One more charge of powder for the guns? " cried Jonathan Haraden, his composure visibly shaken. " But he tallied the kegs last night."

" Aye, sir, but the most of 'em got wetted, sir," answered the urchin who was weeping bitterly. " Water leaked into the magazine and flooded the floor where a shot must ha' started a frame. And the kegs weren't all tight, sir. The chief gunner says it's his fault and he ought to be shot for it. Please, sir, I think so, too."

Captain Haraden patted the boy on the head and told him to take heart. They would see what could be done with that last charge of powder. Then this great sea captain turned to his first officer and said:

" See that every gun is carefully loaded. Break out

those cases of crowbars. Fill the guns with crowbars on top of the round shot."

"Aye, sir, when you lifted those cases of crowbars out of the prize cargo off Cape Sable, I might have known you never meant to use 'em for peaceable ends."

As the powder boy fled forward to join his comrades he was joyously chanting:

"Crowbars! Crowbars! A belly-full of crowbars! And you've got to eat 'em, Johnny Bull."

CHAPTER XVI

STEPHEN BOARDS THE INDIAMAN

JONATHAN HARADEN walked to the rail of the quarter-deck and back again. He brushed a fleck of soot from his waistcoat, stroked his chin, and frowned at the sea. This indicated that he was seriously perturbed, almost nervous. After some cogitation he said to the first officer, with his usual serenity of manner:

"I shall have to alter my plans, Mr. Perkins. I had intended striking the Indiaman in the same place. Two or three more blows like that and we could have split him open like a pumpkin. But this bad news about the powder—only one more charge—spoils our tactics. We shall have to attempt something else. You will be good enough to place this ship farther away from him when we go in again, say about a hundred yards."

"A hundred yards, sir? Good Lord, isn't that too close for comfort?" blurted the troubled Mr. Perkins. "If we lie there broadside on, he will knock the tar out of us."

"Yes, it will mean a drubbing," was the even response, "but we have stood some of his guns on end

and his men are losing heart. It is very trying for him to have to stand and take it. They are perplexed, wondering what we shall do next. Do as I say, at once. And please instruct the chief gunner to train the pieces on the upper deck. Sweep it like a broom."

It was a tribute to the master of the privateer that his crew showed no signs of faltering when these orders were repeated to them. Cheerfully they prepared to fire the last shots in the locker, still confident that the East Indiaman would somehow be theirs. To stand off at a hundred yards seemed like sure destruction but you might be sure, said these unterrified seamen, that Jonathan Haraden had one more trick up his sleeve.

Alas, it was a cruel drubbing when the *Pickering* sailed boldly into this perilous position. The British gun crews were able to hit her fair and square. No longer was she able to snuggle under the very muzzles and baffle and deride them. American sailors were falling, but others leaped to serve in their places. Very deliberately they elevated the guns to point at the quarter-deck and waist of the East Indiaman.

The chief gunner waved his arm as a signal.

"FIRE!" roared Captain Jonathan Haraden.

Those whizzing flights of crowbars were wickeder than shrapnel. Fourteen cannon crammed with them! It was a bloody business on the Englishman's deck when these strange projectiles came shrieking to turn end for end and mow men down. For the moment the sur-

vivors were put to rout. They knew not what to make of it.

During this confusion the privateer sailed out of range but more slowly than ever. She was like a bird with a broken wing. A dozen men were dead or helpless. The others were hacking away at tangled cordage or hauling at wrecked gun-carriages.

This was the end of it, they said among themselves. No more powder! And the Englishman was groggy and almost ready to quit. Well, it had been a grand fight and they had done their best. Clear away the mess and stitch their dead messmates in canvas and go ashore for a frolic in Bilbao among the black-eyed Spanish girls.

But what was this? Captain Haraden wished them to muster aft. They grinned, these admirable seamen, all blood and rags and dirt. Was it another tea-party for the Britishers?

" We are going in again, boys," spoke the calm, strong voice from the quarter-deck. " Close in this time. Did you think we were licked? This ship will require some coaxing but I know you can jockey her along."

They scratched their heads and looked foolish but trotted back to duty. Were they expected to capture the big Indiaman with their bare hands? With difficulty the *Pickering* moved on her appointed course, a stubborn ship that died hard. In order to deceive the enemy, the gunners went through the motions of reloading the

battery. With lusty shouts they hauled the cannon in and ran them out again. The sorely wounded privateer was steered to gain her first position, very close to the Indiaman's side. She answered the helm with a kind of weary reluctance.

A puff of wind set her so near that the end of the main-yard was caught in the Indiaman's rigging. The two ships began to swing to touch each other. This threatened a catastrophe. What the British sailors more than ever desired was to spring aboard the hateful Yankee and wipe out her handful of men.

It so happened that Stephen Claghorn was standing beside the main shrouds. He was the first seaman to jump for the ratlines and scamper aloft to crawl to the end of the main-yard and slash with his knife. It was life or death to cut the ship free of her entanglement with the *Ganges*.

Clinging with one hand, Stephen sawed at the rope. It parted with a twang and he lost his balance. Instead of falling from the yard he lunged forward and caught hold of a hempen stay of the Indiaman's rigging.

The *Pickering* surged ahead as soon as she was released. Poor Stephen was left dangling between sea and sky, *and he was on board of the Indiaman.* Hand over hand he pulled himself up the stay, or taut rope, to reach the wide platform of the maintop. As sure as fate, thought he, a British musket ball would pick him off.

But the marksmen in the maintop of the *Ganges* had been summoned to the deck at the cry of "Boarders Away." And the others of the crew were too much occupied to glance aloft. Their one anxiety was to beat off another of those fourteen gun broadsides at close range which, in truth, might split their sea-worn ship like a pumpkin. The tenacity of this mad Yankee pirate, as they called her, was beyond belief. They endeavored to turn the muzzles of their guns low enough to reach her or pelted her deck with hand grenades.

Wriggling through the "lubber hole" in the platform of the maintop, Stephen Claghorn flattened himself like a bat on a barn door and peered over the edge. This was a disgraceful plight, to be jerked out of his own ship and removed from the fight. What he saw, however, from his lofty hiding-place in the *Ganges* made him forget all else.

Upon the quarter-deck of the *General Pickering* stood Captain Jonathan Haraden. For all his demeanor indicated it, the bullets and grenades might have been so many snowflakes. Two of his officers lay dead beside the helm.

From his waistcoat Captain Haraden took his gold watch and held it in his hand. With the other hand he put the speaking trumpet to his lips. His powerful voice rang out, every word measured and distinct:

"The *Ganges* ahoy! I will give you two minutes by the watch to haul down your colors. If they are not

struck by the end of that time I will sink you, so help me God."

He began to count the seconds aloud. It was like the tolling of a bell.

"ONE—TWO—THREE—FOUR—FIVE—SIX — SEVEN — EIGHT—NINE—TEN ——"

The effect was extraordinary. It was like casting a spell over the two ships. The noise of fighting died into silence. From his own quarter-deck the gray-bearded commander of the Indiaman gazed down at the indomitable privateer upon which the half-naked seamen crouched at the guns with matches lighted. The focus of all eyes was the erect, stalwart figure of the man who stood watch in hand, counting the seconds one by one. His will gripped them. It was a duel of minds, not of ordnance.

From his concealment aloft, Stephen Claghorn looked down in an agony of suspense. The *Pickering* seemed no larger than a pinnace. He heard the voice of Captain Haraden announce:

"A MINUTE GONE! ONE—TWO—THREE—FOUR—FIVE—SIX—SEVEN ——"

Would this splendid stratagem fail? It was the last throw of the dice. Stephen glanced down at the deck of the Indiaman and the wreckage of the battle. Heavens, the American gunners had made hash of her. Oh, for more powder!

Powder? Stephen perceived almost directly beneath

him an open hatch of the *Ganges* and near it a pile of powder cases which had been passed up from the magazine. During this lull the boys had ceased from carrying the powder to the guns. Behind the mainmast Stephen could see a tub of hand-grenades and a fire-pot for lighting the fuses.

Stephen Claghorn was no more heroic than his shipmates of the *Pickering* but duty was his gospel and the love of life took second place.

Sheltered from view by the great mainsail, he slid down a rope and alighted on deck. All grimy and tattered as he was, the British seamen took him for one of their own crew if they noticed him at all. It was the work of an instant to snatch up a hand-grenade, touch the fuse to a live coal, and toss the bomb into the pile of powder cases beside the hatch.

Throwing himself flat behind the mainmast, Stephen awaited results. No doubt he would be blown to fragments. This was what he expected. He was not so much frightened as tremendously eager to see what would happen.

The grenade did not wait to explode. It dropped into loose powder spilled on deck. The sputtering fuse ignited this. The powder cases erupted in a volcano of red flame and smoke which gushed as high as the maintop. The noise was like the detonation of gigantic firecrackers. Men were blown across the deck, scorched or dying. The flames licked the mainsail which began to

blaze like an immense torch. Tongues of fire licked the shattered deck-houses and broken boats.

Somewhat protected by the huge butt of the mainmast, a tortured lad named Stephen rolled over and over and wondered why he was not dead. The skin was peeled from his face. His hair was singed off. His lungs were filled with smoke. He tried to crawl on hands and knees but fell and lay with his head on his arm. As in a dream he heard the fateful seconds tolled by Captain Jonathan Haraden:

"FIFTY-EIGHT—FIFTY-NINE—THE TWO MINUTES GONE."

Stephen's vision was blurred but he dimly saw the portly English commander tug at his beard, shake his head, and then limp across the deck to grasp the flag halliards. With his own hands he hauled down the tattered red ensign. It fluttered to the deck in honorable defeat.

His blistered face and burning lungs forgotten, Stephen blubbered for joy. He was still dazed and helpless when his hilarious comrades came over the side. Two of them hoisted him upon their shoulders and carried him aft. They laid him down upon a mattress fetched from a cabin and he was quite contented.

Presently Captain Haraden came on board the *Ganges*. He was no longer hard and cold. With a gracious demeanor and a smile of sympathy he ap-

proached the downcast English commander who said to him:

"I am under the painful necessity of surrendering to you the ship *Ganges* of the Honorable East India Company. I ask your kindness in behalf of my wounded men."

"They shall be treated like my own, Captain—your name, if you please,—Captain Glendinning. My compliments on an action fought with great spirit and gallantry."

The elderly Englishman flushed and awkwardly unbuckled his sword belt.

"Keep it, sir," exclaimed the American. "You have worn your sword with too much credit to be deprived of it."

"Thank you. Very handsome behavior, I am sure," was the reply. "I have cursed you until now as a Yankee pirate but I must, perforce, call you a gentleman."

"There are many such under my country's flag," gravely returned Captain Haraden. "I will endeavor to make you comfortable in my own ship. Meanwhile we must both look after our men. The *Ganges* has taken fire from the powder explosion, I observe. All your able-bodied hands would better rally to lay the hose and pass buckets. With wind enough I shall try to work the prize into Bilbao harbor and find an anchorage."

Fine old sailor that he was, the Englishman displayed no more bitterness. These were two men of a kind who respected each other. The captured seamen had been quickly disarmed and were told to help save the ship. Left on the mattress, Stephen Claghorn set his teeth to grin and bear it but he could not help moaning. Captain Haraden found him there and called an assistant surgeon of the *Ganges*.

"How did this happen, Steve?" asked the tender-hearted captain. "I saw you topple from the main-yard and scrabble into the Indiaman's rigging. Were you blown up in that explosion of powder?"

"Yes, sir. I had to be. I did it. You were ticking off the two minutes and I saw a chance to help persuade the enemy. So I chucked a grenade where it would do the most good."

"By Jupiter, it *was* persuasive," exclaimed Jonathan Haraden, with a rare laugh. "And precisely in the nick of time! I was most uncomfortable. This trick of holding the watch was a forlorn hope. Moral suasion instead of broadsides! But I knew that the spirit of this big *Ganges* was badly shaken. However, the stout old skipper might have defied me but for your providential explosion, Steve. It crumpled their resistance."

"You took the heart out of them, sir," protested the lad. "I hastened things a bit."

The surgeon was applying oil and cotton and band-

ages. The burns would heal but he did not like the coughing spells which almost strangled Stephen.

" The boy inhaled the fiery powder gas, Captain Haraden. He is luckier than some of us. A quartermaster and a gunner's mate are already dead from the blast of it."

" This lad will get well? " was the anxious query.

" It may be a slow recovery. Send him ashore is my advice."

" That I will, among the good people of Bilbao," replied Captain Haraden. " He shall have the very best of care."

This aroused Stephen who ceased coughing to splutter:

" But I belong in my ship. Will you sail away and leave me, sir? "

" Better that, Steve, than to be stitched in a hammock with a shot at your feet, and the burial service read."

CHAPTER XVII

EDUCATION AMONG THE TAR POTS

A CERTAIN Salem schoolmaster called Benjamin Gerrish has played a considerable part in this story. In the course of his adventures as a patriot he had narrowly escaped being hanged by a seafaring ruffian, Captain Enoch Crooke, with peculiar ideas concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. Alas, there are young people of to-day who are naughty enough to think, even if they dare not speak of it aloud, that it was a mistake not to dispose of a schoolmaster in this convenient manner.

Master Gerrish was so thankful to be alive that he took his misfortunes like a philosopher. When his captors kicked him into the shabby schooner's storeroom among the tar pots and bales of oakum, he used no bad words but sat down and thought of various things. It was dreary to face the return to the Old Mill Prison but there would be the lively pastime of trying to break out again. And for a man who had led a studious career he was seeing a good deal of the world.

His two comrades in calamity were of a more impatient breed. Rebels they were in name and deed. That

lean, puckered shipmaster, Captain Silas Ropes, banged the tar pots together to emphasize his remarks while sturdy Henry Holter swore to stand by. The gist of it was that they had been treated outrageously. Bullied, insulted, and frightened out of a year's growth! Made sport of at the whim of a drunken old reprobate of a skipper who ought to be shut up in a madhouse!

" To my dying day I'll regret the night I saved his life in Pernambuco," savagely spoke Silas Ropes. " By the eternal, I'd smother him in one of these tar pots with no more compunction than if I stepped on a bug."

" You can't call this sundowner of an Enoch Crooke a proper Englishman," said Henry Holter. " He's a hell-fired outlaw. What are you going to do to him, Silas? "

" Capture his rotten schooner if I have to do it single-handed. Then I think I'll hang him or maybe boil him in oil."

Master Gerrish shook himself out of his meditations and inquired:

" How many men in this vessel? You sound very rash, Silas. A fit of temper has twisted your judgment."

" Who said anything about judgment? " retorted the shipmaster. " Was it good judgment for a mob of farmers to try to hold Bunker Hill? How many men in this little swill-tub that miscalls herself a British privateer? Twenty! No more! That includes the

idlers, cooks, and such. They were all on deck, every cussed mother's son of 'em, to see us hanged."

"Twenty men, Silas," persisted Ben Gerrish, "is an unhealthy majority. We are but three, snugly locked up with no weapons but tar pots."

"Stow the dashed arithmetic. We can get out, can't we?"

"You are a violent man, Silas Ropes, and I ask no better leader, but let us sit among the tar pots for a day or two and cudgel our wits. This notion of capturing the schooner interests me."

"Steady your helm, Silas," advised Henry Holter. "There's bigger dunces afloat than this same schoolmaster."

Food was brought them by a half-grown boy, thin and pale, who had a scared look and refused to talk. At night they stretched themselves on the floor with bags of oakum for pillows. The wicked old sinner of a Captain Enoch Crooke visited them only once. No sooner had he poked his bald head in the door than Silas Ropes hurled a tar pot which unfortunately missed the mark.

"I'd hang ye for that, in spite of my word," shouted the indignant Enoch, "but there's that favor that was done me in Pernambuco and I'm obligated to be as gentle as a lamb. I was for askin' you depraved rebels to play a game o' cards in my cabin."

"Get out and leave us alone, you dirty old rogue," roared Silas Ropes.

"No gratitude. No manners. No nothin'," said Enoch Crooke as he beat a retreat.

Benjamin Gerrish continued to occupy himself with long, long thoughts. For hours he sat as dumb and wooden as a ship's figurehead. The first symptom of a renewed interest in life was when he began to make himself agreeable to the frightened cabin boy who brought in the bread and water and salt beef. The sea waif lingered a minute or two instead of scurrying out to lock the door. It was something new to hear kindly words spoken. There was no harm in hearing what the prisoners had to say. They were the only decent men in the schooner.

"Have you taken any prizes?" ventured Ben Gerrish.

"Never a one," replied the boy. "My first voyage a-privateerin', and I'd sooner starve ashore."

"Did you fight any actions on this cruise?"

"The schooner ain't never fired a shot since we sailed out o' London River."

"But the captain was wounded—a bullet in the elbow ——"

"Rot my soul, I talked too much a'ready," broke in the boy. "He swore he'd cut my tongue out if I blabbed."

"Why was that?" asked the schoolmaster, with increasing interest.

"Afeard of me turnin' soft and gettin' too chummy

with you, I suppose," sullenly answered the boy, his manner evasive.

" But what harm can we do? Three distressful men as helpless as babes. Three prisoners in an armed ship, and twenty hearts of oak to guard us."

" Go ask the old rummy hisself. Hearts of oak? Huh! Hearts of punk! The best men deserted at Madeira, seven of 'em. I durst not jump the ship. Wish I had."

Wary of discovery by the old rummy hisself, the boy said no more and fled from the room. Master Gerrish looked as pleased as if he had been given a problem in mathematics to solve. This annoyed the impetuous Silas Ropes who felt inclined to fling a tar pot at him.

" Wipe that silly grin off your mug, Ben. I can stand just about so much. Cozening that brat of a gutter-snipe will get you nowhere. I had a notion of knocking him on the head but what's the profit in that? He would be missed in a jiffy."

" You lack education, Silas. It whets the intellect," chided the schoolmaster. " That boy is a treasure. What he said just now is like a candle in a darkened room. A feeble ray, but I begin to grope about."

" Read me no riddles and avast with the parables," cried Silas Ropes. " What did you make of it? "

Instead of obeying this mandate, Master Gerrish did a curious thing. He sniffed once and he sniffed twice and then he walked to the bulkhead and sniffed at a

crack in the wall. Eyeing this performance with puzzled disfavor, Henry Holter sensibly observed:

"Intellect whetted too fine, Silas. Cracked like my old razor."

"Pad the walls with oakum," suggested Captain Ropes. "Next thing you know, he may try to butt his addled brains out."

The schoolmaster was indifferent to these rude comments. He seemed to enjoy drawing his breath through his nose. At his leisure he sat down and found space for his long legs. As if delivering a lecture from a desk, he began:

"My sense of smell is acute. This explains, in part, why I am a wretched sailor. All ships smell unpleasantly. Coarse-fibred persons like yourselves seem to thrive on tar and bilge-water and all the other stenches. Last night I was conscious of a new odor, very agreeable. When I fell asleep I dreamt of Derby Wharf in Salem and the ships discharging cargoes at the warehouses. This morning I scented the same fragrant blend of odors. The dream helped me to guess what they might be—casks and pipes of wines from the Canaries as they sling them out of the holds at Derby Wharf, and the hogsheads of russet tobacco from Virginia and the Carolinas."

"Have mercy," cried Silas Ropes. "Do you want to make our torments worse?"

"Listen to me, you thirsty babbler," resumed Ben

Gerrish. " This schooner has wines and tobacco in her hold. The shivery cabin boy let it out that she has been to Madeira. That is where the cargo was taken on. This is no honest trading vessel, as you well know. Her master claims that she is a lawful privateer, with the king's commission."

" It was the old varmint's pretext for hanging us," growled Silas.

" But not a shot has been fired in action," the schoolmaster went on to say, " and there was no great zeal to find the enemy. This is to be inferred from the ' twenty hearts of punk.' The seven good men who deserted at Madeira may have been disgusted with the cruise and the vessel."

" Pipes of ripe Madeira wines and hogsheads of prime tobacco!" gloatingly murmured Silas Ropes. " Now am I likely to break out single-handed. My sense of smell may not be acute, old bookworm, but I begin to smell what you are driving at. Contraband, eh?"

" Aye, verily, Silas, to be smuggled into England. This sea robber has no intention of paying the king's duties. Nor does he wish us to know what his cargo is. The poor cabin boy was sworn to silence, at pain of death. Less risk and more coin in running contraband than in swapping broadsides. Enoch Crooke finds the privateering commission a most convenient cloak."

" It might be a letter of marque, Ben," suggested the experienced Captain Ropes, " giving a ship license to

carry cargo from port to port and to take prizes if the occasion offers. But I think you have the right slant. This crew looks to me like a precious lot of Channel smugglers."

"Then if I have hit the nail on the head," concluded Master Gerrish, "this Captain Enoch Crooke will not sail into London River with his wines and tobacco. He is much more apt to make a landing in some small, out-of-the-way port, say on the Cornish coast. And his men will have to run the stuff ashore ——"

"Say no more, Diogenes, say no more! If I can't kick my way out of this kennel just about then, you can feed me on oakum."

Henry Holter was kind enough to say:

"I'm glad your acute nose wasn't smashed by a musket at Salem North Bridge, Ben, instead of young Steve Claghorn's."

The schoolmaster replied that he felt flattered. Later in the day, after further reflection, he found more to say. Captain Enoch Crooke carried an arm in a sling. A splintered elbow the mate, Dick Webb, had called it, and done by a bullet. Had he been wounded while on board of the schooner? If so, one of his own men must have shot him. There had been no engagements with other vessels. Who was the man with the ready pistol and where was he now? If still in the ship were there others of the crew who had sided with him against the drunken despot of a captain?

With a grudge to settle and the crew divided, the three Americans might not have to reckon twenty men against them.

"Aye, a mutiny would have our cordial assistance," said Silas Ropes. "Would to God we knew how to touch it off. This mate, Dick Webb, is a shrewd young man nor does it look as if he swizzled the rum. And all the love he has for us you could ram in a thimble. It disappointed him when we were not hanged out of hand. We can count on no help from that quarter."

"He may hate Yankee rebels but he hates his skipper more," was the sagacious opinion of Master Gerrish. "Did ever the chief officer of a ship relish being called a lousy dog?"

"Not in my experience as a mariner," exclaimed Silas Ropes. "When I was first mate of a ship I'd ha' shot the master that called me—well, by gum and ginger, I wonder if you have fathomed it. Dick Webb drilled the old rascal with a pistol ball?"

"The riddle is not so easy to read as all that," answered Ben. "This Enoch Crooke may have been shot in one of his tipsy brawls ashore. But this putting two and two together helps to while away the time."

They waited eagerly until the timorous cabin boy came again with the pewter plates and mugs. He lingered a little longer, vouchsafing that the captain was asleep and Mr. Dick Webb in charge of the deck. Ben Gerrish gave him a shilling piece at which

he actually smiled, saying that this was all the money he had to show for the voyage and it would buy a gift for his mother in Greenwich. The questions the schoolmaster asked him were innocent enough, such as this:

"Does the captain suffer much pain from that wounded arm of his?"

"Groans and swears terrible, so he does. If a surgeon was aboard, he'd ha' cut it off, says he. I've been dressin' it for him. A hurt like that don't heal in a week, I tells him."

"A week? Of course not," remarked Master Gerrish. "At Madeira, now, he could have had the arm properly set and cleansed."

"We sailed from there three weeks gone, you stupid," scoffed the boy.

"It must mean much extra duty for your mate, Mr. Richard Webb, with the captain disabled," suggested Silas Ropes.

"A fine sailor and decent-like, but what can *he* do, men watchin' him night and day to cut him down if he so much as ——"

A hoarse shout from the captain's cabin and the boy rolled his eyes in terror. With a piteous gasp he turned to run. As he delayed to lock the door, the prisoners heard him cry out in answer:

"Comin', sir, as fast as I can."

Master Gerrish was seriously disappointed. A little more and the boy might have revealed the secret of the

ship. He had said enough, however, to provoke earnest discussion. Captain Enoch Crooke had been shot during the homeward voyage from Madeira. Dick Webb had done the deed in a personal quarrel or had been involved in a mutiny. These were the deductions. Most of the men had remained loyal to the captain, or else the mate would have gained the upper hand.

"Men watching this Dick Webb night and day to cut him down if he so much as—what?" repeated Ben Gerrish.

"If he tries to make a neater job of pistolling Enoch Crooke, for one thing," replied Silas. "A dangerous young man, this Richard Webb, with no scruples about killing his fellow mortals. He was ready to hang me with all the good-will in the world."

"And primed for mutiny," said Henry Holter. "I'm with him."

"Why was he not shot down himself or clapped in irons?" queried Silas. "I can answer that. There was no officer competent to fill his place."

"As a navigator, Silas?" ventured the schoolmaster. "This Enoch Crooke may be a seaman, but ignorant of the science of longitudes and latitudes. Like many of you thick-witted shipmasters, he lacks education."

"I'll bang your head for that when we get ashore," was the hot retort.

This was as far as their conjectures could carry them but they hoped to beguile the forlorn cabin boy into

yielding further information. If this Dick Webb actually stood in peril of his own life, he might be willing to join a plot to gain possession of the schooner. It was well worth attempting to get a message to him, that three resolute men would risk any hazards to win their freedom. The cabin boy was the one hope of communication although he seemed like a very slender thread.

To their profound dismay, he failed to appear again. In his stead a seaman brought the food to the storeroom. There was no coaxing a word out of this truculent fellow. His manners were like those of Captain Enoch Crooke, a growl and a curse, and a hand on a weapon. A swarthy rogue with long moustaches, he resembled a rover of the Spanish Main. When he had gone, Silas Ropes sadly exclaimed:

"While you were smelling Madeira wines, Ben, old pedagogue, somebody else smelled a rat. We'll see the weedy cabin boy no more."

"That goose is cooked," agreed Master Gerrish, "and all the wear and tear on my intellect gone for naught. But perhaps Dick Webb is using his own wits and will endeavor to come in touch with us. He is in desperate straits. A man in his fix would be ready to make a compact with the devil himself."

"Yes, he will take long chances," said Silas. "If this Dick Webb is guilty of assaulting the master of the vessel or inciting mutiny, he will most certainly be hanged at Execution Dock in London River. And

Enoch Crooke is a man to see him safely delivered to the gibbet."

"Sit tight. Don't fret," said Henry Holter. "Care killed a cat."

"The right word as usual, Henry. You are as solid as a brick house and more comfort than a noggin of rum."

Sitting tight was infinitely irksome. Head winds held the schooner back. Her destination was unknown to the three men in the filthy storeroom with the water leaking through the deck seams and pitchy darkness much of the time. But faith is the substance of things hoped for, saith the Good Book, and these were men of a pioneer strain whose faith was a firm foundation. Pilgrim and Puritan, their kin had tamed the wilderness shore and mastered the unfriendly sea. There was strong consolation when Benjamin Gerrish knelt among the tar pots and prayed God to save them from the enemies which encompassed them about.

CHAPTER XVIII

THEY FIND THE SCILLY ISLANDS

IT was in the night-time when, at length, the schooner came into quieter water. Had the weather turned fair or was she in some bay or river? Silas Ropes felt certain that she had not sailed far enough to reach the wide estuary of the Thames. They heard the crew take in sail. After a while the anchor splashed. The vessel rode at rest from her buoyant and giddy motion.

Nothing more happened for several hours, so far as the prisoners were able to conjecture. In the alley-way outside the storeroom door they heard the boots of a sentry as he tramped back and forth. The three Americans talked in whispers. Whatever the situation might develop, they were tense and alert to take advantage of it.

A boat bumped the schooner's side. Visitors clambered to the deck. A hatch cover was dragged off. Tackle was rigged for hoisting cargo from the hold. His nose might not be acute but Silas Ropes knew by ear the meaning of every movement aboard a vessel. A rusty winch squealed as it raised a burden to the deck.

" No honest merchandise would be shifted into a boat by night," said Silas. " You hit the mark, Ben. Smug-

gling it is. And a bright moon to work by. Enoch Crooke must ha' made signals to his pals ashore to come off and get the stuff."

"And will he send some of his own seamen in the boat to help dispose of it in a hiding-place?" said Ben Gerrish. "Does he trust these pals of his? No honor among thieves."

"His crew is busy with the cargo, Ben. Some may be handling the casks and hogsheads in the boat. 'Tis now or never for us. But we have heard naught whatever from this Dick Webb. And this is his one chance to fight clear of the gallows."

"Wait!" counseled Master Gerrish. "They may not finish by morning. And they dare not smuggle the cargo by daylight. To-morrow night may fetch Dick Webb to help us, for all we know. Enoch Crooke is more likely to be drunk and off his guard when the schooner's hold is empty."

And now the young man of few words, Henry Holter, concluded that there had been too much speech and too little action. It was not his habit to twiddle his thumbs forever. Bull-necked and curly haired was he, with square brows and a jaw like a rock. He had listened courteously to all this wise argument and he felt the greatest respect for the intelligence of his comrades twain. But in his simple code of conduct the only way to get a thing done was to go and do it.

"By thunder, let's go find this Dick Webb," he spoke

up, " and capture the dirty schooner atwixt us. Never was a better time."

With this he emitted a tremendous bellow and hurled a wooden tar bucket against the door. There was method in his madness and the others were quick to take the cue. They bombarded the door with pots and buckets, yelling like demons. The crashing uproar was magnificent. As fast as they could pick up the heavy missiles they let them fly again.

It sounded as if they were knocking the vessel to pieces. Henry Holter made noise enough for seven men. As he had anticipated, the sentry on duty in the alley-way was not only startled but curious. It did no good to bawl at them to be quiet. The destructive riot had to be quelled. Cautiously he unlocked the door, drawing his pistol in readiness to fire.

This was enough for Henry Holter. His broad shoulder struck the door like a battering-ram. It flew back on its hinges and the sentry went along with it.

Into the alley-way lunged Henry. His hard fist hit the seaman like the blow of a mallet. The fellow tottered. The pistol was snatched from his hand and the butt of it crashed against his skull. Here was one down.

With a whoop like a red Indian, Captain Silas Ropes came bolting out, pursued by Master Benjamin Gerrish. Ahead of them raced Henry Holter, straight for the main cabin in search of cutlasses. As he ran he shouted:

" Dick Webb ahoy! Yankee rebels to the rescue!"

A lantern burned in the main cabin. Providence aided this desperate enterprise. Against a bulkhead was a rack of cutlasses which had been left unlocked. Henry Holter rushed to the rack and jerked out a heavy blade. Whirling about to make for the deck, he saw something that stopped him short.

The trunk of the mainmast was in his cabin. Against it stood a man with his arms stretched behind him. His lips were swollen and bleeding. A wad of oakum had been jammed between his teeth to serve as a gag. It was Richard Webb himself. His wrists were in irons, as Henry discovered, and to these handcuffs was attached a chain long enough to pass around the mainmast and hold him in this tortured posture.

"For safe-keeping, eh?" said Henry, as he removed the gag. "You are no more use to Enoch Crooke?"

"Caught me by surprise—moored me here—hammered me with a sword hilt when he had me chained fast," was the indistinct mutter. "You can't cast this chain off."

"Can't I? Hey, Silas," shouted Henry. "Here with a cutlass. We both learned to strike on a shipsmith's forge as boys. Guard the companionway, Ben."

Straight and true, one and two, in ringing measure, the two Yankee mariners swung the good steel blades and bit into the chain that encircled the mast. Sparks flew from the tough links. A cutlass snapped in twain

and Henry snatched up another. Into the same notch. blow after blow, they drove the blades. The link was almost severed when the pinioned Dick Webb wrenched with all his strength and the chain snapped.

" Never mind the wrist-irons," he mumbled. " I can fight with 'em on. To the deck, you blessed rebels! Three true men'll join us."

Just then Ben Gerrish, on guard at the foot of the stairway, was seen to drop his cutlass. His long arms wrapped themselves around the middle of a man who was in the act of descending. Down they rolled together, thump, thump, and sprawled upon the cabin floor. It was the old rummy himself, Captain Enoch Crooke. The hard case had struck something harder. Fair upon that splintered elbow did he land and the pain of it was too much. He lay in a dead faint.

Dick Webb was about to run him through with a cutlass but Ben Gerrish knocked the weapon aside.

" I couldn't bear to slay a crippled man nor must you, Richard Webb. He is harmless. On deck with you."

They rushed up into the moonlight, four of them now, and surprised the boatswain who was running to enter the cabin. Dick Webb had his own account to square. Before the man could cry for quarter he was in a crumpled heap. Others of the crew could be seen grouped at the open hatch forward. Dick Webb called to them in his queer, broken voice:

" Friends o' mine, this way! The vessel is ours! "

THEY RUSHED UP INTO THE MOONLIGHT, FOUR OF THEM NOW

The group broke in confusion, making an outcry, snatching up weapons. Three figures swiftly detached themselves and answered Dick Webb's urgent summons. They raced to join him. And now there were seven against fifteen able-bodied men.

But the hearts of punk were not inclined to fight to the death. A few of them leaped into the smuggler's boat alongside. These included the timorous cabin boy. The boat discreetly shoved off under sail and oar and moved out into the bay. Those who stayed on board found themselves cornered with the forecastle at their backs. They resisted in a whirlpool of combat.

Richard Webb, chains flying from his wrists, was singling out the men whom he hated most but the three Yankee rebels were indiscriminate. Henry Holter tore into the thick of it, like a bull at a gate, now stabbing or thrusting, again using the cutlass like a flail. When a foeman weakened, Henry tossed him into the open hatch and yelled for another one.

Sinewy Silas Ropes fought without noise. To his mind the cutlass was the prettiest weapon ever contrived and should not be employed as a cudgel. It was wonderful to see him dodge and parry and bide his time until the other man discharged his pistol or aimed a futile blow. Then the cutlass swung like a flash of light and Silas Ropes had one less enemy to tally. He was never far from Master Benjamin Gerrish whose spirit

was mightily willing but who was a novice at this hellish business.

The odds were not so formidable as they had, at first, appeared. Henry Holter flung four men into the hatch. Silas relieved three more of their troubles, for he was the best swordsman in all this affray. Master Gerrish had selected a light-weight whom he hugged like a bear and threw overboard. Richard Webb broke his cutlass short off and then ran amuck with a three-foot stick of oak firewood. Before it could be realized, the survivors were on their knees begging for mercy.

"Kill 'em all, every —— —— of 'em," savagely mumbled Dick Webb, his shirt blotched with crimson.

"Nay, you varmint," panted Silas Ropes. "These are your own shipmates and countrymen."

"And when I was under guard, to be taken home and hanged, did they lift a finger to save me? After I had put a bullet into the drunken lunatic of a skipper to stop his cruelty? He would ha' killed the cabin boy—dirked him for a whim—but for me. And when I stepped in, did the cowardly beggars join me? Whimpered like curs when the old man threatened 'em—all but the three staunch bullies that helped us win this fight of ours."

"More of this anon," said Captain Silas Ropes, and he aimed a warning finger at the truculent young man. "Your bullies have had enough of bloodshed for one night and will do as I say. I am in command of this

vessel and she belongs to the United States of America. Remember that! Mr. Henry Holter is the chief officer. Now get your blasted Englishmen together and let's clean up this mess. What is the name of this schooner?"

"*Fortune's Favorite,*" answered the bewildered young man. "Am I a prisoner? What the devil d'ye mean?"

"A prisoner or a dead man. Take your choice," was the stern reply. "But I shall deal fair and square with you and your three faithful men. My idea of returning favors is different from Enoch Crooke's. Go bind up your wound if it needs it. We are all of us scratched and pinked but nobody killed, thank God. Fortune's favorites, by gum and ginger!"

Swiftly Captain Silas Ropes took command of the situation. He was a Yankee shipmaster come into his own. As he had perceived, the trio of trusty British seamen were perplexed by the turn of events. Their motive had been to save Dick Webb from the gallows. This achieved, they were not eager to engage the three infuriated American rebels. They would wait and hear what Dick Webb might have to say. It was Captain Ropes, however, who confronted them with a cocked pistol in each hand. In his dry way he said:

"You are red-handed mutineers, men. You joined us rebels in rising against the master of a vessel with the king's commission. You know what that means if I set you ashore with the rest of 'em. Captain Enoch

Crooke'll never sleep until you three criminals are hanged in a row. This schooner is bound for the United States and she needs able seamen. Swear allegiance and you will be well paid at the end of the voyage and receive your share of prize money from the sale of the vessel. And, by the eternal, you will have the honor of serving under the glorious flag of a nation whose motto is ' Give me Liberty or Give me Death.' "

This oration caused the three seamen to confer with their heads together. The words were more eloquently convincing than the cocked pistols. In England they were dead men. No denying that! There were no flaws in the logic of this Captain Ropes. Presently one of them stepped forward to say:

" We'll sign on, sir, and glad of the chance. And you can trust us to do our duty. Does Mr. Dick Webb sail with us? "

" That depends. He will, if he has any regard for his own skin. Now turn to, lads. Fish those rascals out of the hold. Get the prisoners together, wounded and all."

Henry Holter and Ben Gerrish were already manning a tackle to hoist one of the schooner's boats over the side. Captain Ropes went into the cabin. The evil old skipper still lay where he had fallen, at the foot of the stairs. His harsh face had a grayish hue and there was froth on his lips. Dick Webb came along and callously exclaimed:

"A seizure of some kind. I hope it's the death of him. Still alive? What shall be done with him?"

"Carry him on deck and lower him into the boat. He may come out of this fit. If he does, what about you, Mr. Richard Webb?"

"My life is forfeited, of course, if I choose to leave this ship," was the quick response.

"Can I trust you?" queried Silas Ropes. "Your hatred of Yankee rebels makes me pause ——"

"I do hold them to be traitors to the Crown," was the honest statement. "And I would show them no mercy were I in authority. But I owe you my life and will never turn against you."

"You will refuse to swear allegiance, I see that," said Silas Ropes, with a new respect for this vagabondish young man. "Then I shall have to put you on parole. And when we reach America you will be regarded as a prisoner of war. You may count on a good word from me, Dick Webb, and all assistance, if you keep the bargain."

"A hard dilemma, Captain Ropes. But I'd sooner be alive among you rebels and pirates ——"

Silas grinned amiably at this. Together they lifted the inanimate Enoch Crooke who opened his eyes and glared without speech. On deck they found the boat ready to lower away. The wounded were rudely bandaged and laid upon blankets in the bottom of the boat. Those not seriously hurt were told to take the oars.

Enoch Crooke was propped in the stern-sheets, his grizzled head wagging helplessly. The boat slowly moved away in the moonlight with its melancholy freightage.

This business dispatched, the energetic Silas Ropes lost no time in planning the long voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Seven men to sail the schooner three thousand miles, but it was no more audacious than certain episodes already described. The American exiles were done with seeking refuge in France. Given a vessel large enough for the voyage, they were homeward bound. And could anything be more auspicious than to have captured a schooner with the name of *Fortune's Favorite?*

It was necessary to fill the water barrels and to find more provisions. The bay in which they were anchored was not far from the port of Penzance on the coast of Cornwall. It was out of the question to run in there. The alarm would spread as soon as the boat-load of wounded men should reach the shore. Captain Ropes therefore suggested:

"Penzance, as I recall it, lies close by Land's End which is the outermost cape of England. West by south, no more than fifty miles from her, are the Scilly Islands. We shall pass them close by and why not find water and stores there?"

"The fabled isles of Lyonesse," chimed in the schoolmaster.

"Away with your trashy fables," cried Silas. "What can you tell us, Dick Webb?"

"A goodly little town and a pleasant harbor, Captain Ropes, and simple English folk. They do a thriving trade at smuggling. I have been there in this same schooner."

"Then we can barter wines and tobacco for what stores we need. Ho for the Scilly Islands! Heave your anchor and make sail."

A short-handed crew it was, and stiff and sore, but there was no lack of zeal to quit old England's shores. The schooner flitted from the bay before the break of day and Captain Silas Ropes stood on the quarter-deck and whistled between his teeth. To him came Master Benjamin Gerrish and respectfully inquired:

"What is my station, sir? If my knowledge of the science of navigation can be of service ——"

"Perdition take your science," was the rude reception. "I was finding my way about the high seas when you weren't old enough to wipe your own nose. No, I'll try to make an able seaman of you, Ben."

"You are the master, Silas, but permit me to say that in matters of education you are a silly old chucklehead."

During the forenoon the weather turned cloudy with squalls of rain. It grew thicker as the day wore on, a low, sodden sky and a soaking drizzle. The wind blew from one quarter and then from another. The signs

foretold a gale. With so few men, Captain Ropes prudently reefed sail and made the vessel as secure as possible. He had hoped to find the Scilly Islands before the sun went down but the fickle wind and the broken seas held the schooner back.

The misty night overtook her with no glimpse of a landfall. The position was mostly guesswork but Silas Ropes had confidence in his dead-reckoning. And Dick Webb, more familiar with these waters, agreed that there was plenty of sea-room.

Tide and current were so baffling, however, that the Yankee skipper hauled off to the eastward to give the land a wide berth and wait until morning. By midnight the wind was so heavy that the schooner was hove to.

Four hours after this they heard the roar of breakers dashing against the cliffs. The schooner struggled to avoid the peril but the wind drove her shoreward. She struck with terrific violence and hung fast upon the back of a granite reef. The men clung in the rigging while the shouting breakers stamped across the deck.

Washed into the lee scupper, Captain Silas Ropes emerged half-drowned to look for his crew. Another toppling sea lifted the schooner clear of the reef and dashed her closer to the cliffs. Inside the barrier reef the breakers were less destructive but the vessel's keel was ripping and pounding.

The seven men were still alive and able to muster aft for orders. "If she holds together till dawn,"

shouted Silas Ropes, "we may be able to get ashore. This is one way to find the Scilly Islands. Consarn you, Ben Gerrish, don't you dare open your mouth to mention silly navigation."

CHAPTER XIX

A TRUCE WITH THE ENEMY

IN a spacious room overlooking the harbor of Bilbao, young Stephen Claghorn was learning to play chess. At a table beside his bed sat a portly, gray-bearded man whose velvet cuffs and gilt buttons bore the crest of the Honorable East India Company. This was the former commander of the stately *Ganges* which rode at anchor below the town. A hundred Spanish workmen were repairing the damages suffered in the battle with the American privateer.

The Englishmen had been released on parole and their bluff captain had taken a fancy to the invalid Salem boy. The enmity was forgotten, even though Stephen had done his best to blow the Indiaman to kingdom come.

As the surgeon had predicted, the burns from the powder blast were healing but it was slower work recovering from the effects of the fiery gas which had been drawn into the lungs. It was a miracle that so little of it had been inhaled. Throwing himself on deck and holding his sleeve to his face had saved the lad from speedy death. For days he had tossed in fever and

anguish, and the choking spells had stabbed him like a knife.

He was easier now and could be propped up with pillows. The game of chess was interrupted by the entrance of Captain Jonathan Haraden. Bilbao had honored and entertained him as a conquering hero but he was the same serene and modest gentleman. With a bow to the recent enemy, he said:

" You have been very good to this boy of mine, Captain Glendinning. I could ask no kinder friends for him than this Spanish grandee and his family who have made him their guest. But the language is strange to him. And he yearns to hear his own tongue."

" It has been a solace for me, sir," replied the fatherly Englishman. " Time hangs heavy on my hands. With my own officers and men I cannot afford to be familiar. Rank forbids. Are you skilled at chess, Captain Haraden? "

" I play it indifferently. We must have a bout before I sail."

" Before you sail? " echoed Stephen Claghorn from the pillows. " What is the news? When will the *General Pickering* be ready for sea? "

" The ship is almost fit to proceed, Steve. Plenty of labor has made short work of it. Bilbao turned to with a will. The trouble was to find seamen to recruit my crew. The losses were heavy, as you know. However, a Spanish brig has brought in the people of an American

merchant vessel which was wrecked off Cape Quejo. There are some thirty-five of them. Of these a score have volunteered to sign articles for a privateering cruise."

"Then you will stay longer on this side of the ocean?" wistfully inquired Stephen. "I thought you might be sailing home to Salem."

"With a ship in condition and a complement of men, I shall try to stay out two or three months longer."

"And you will take me with you, sir? I am not yet fit to fight but there is no medicine like salt water."

Captain Haraden sorrowfully shook his head as he answered:

"Too rough a life, Steve, and I could not give you proper care. To put it bluntly, you would be in the way. And I want to see you restored to sound health, for your own sake and your dear mother's."

"Then I am to be left behind in Bilbao?"

"For the present, yes. In this same house, with all the attention that money and affection can bestow."

Stephen bit his lip and winked back the tears but he had learned to obey orders without complaint. The commander of the East Indiaman, who had been wrapped in his own gloomy reflections, now aroused himself to say:

"Have you decided what to do with the *Ganges,* Captain Haraden?"

"Yes. I had almost made up my mind to sell ship

and cargo for what they would fetch. But she has been made fairly seaworthy. And a dozen of the American castaways from the wrecked merchantman are willing to try to carry her across to Salem. I shall give them as many more Spanish sailors. A risky voyage, I know, but you must lay it to my vanity, Captain Glendinning. Such a noble prize as this tall East Indiaman has seldom been seen in an American harbor."

"Two dozen men may manage it, with favoring weather," said the Englishman. A grim smile was on his rugged features as he added:

"It will be slow sailing with so small a crew and I hope to God she is snapped up by a ship under my own flag."

This discussion greatly interested Stephen Claghorn who broke in to implore:

"If I can't go with you, Captain Haraden, will you please tell them to take me in the Indiaman? I can live like a lord and be as comfortable as you please. And the ship will fight no actions, so I won't be in the way."

"I shall have to leave it to the medical men, Steve. I am leaving port in two or three days. The *Ganges* should be ready for sea in another fortnight. Provided your health will stand it, I see no objection. As for the hazards of the voyage, you chance capture or drowning in whatever vessel you cross the sea. Aye, it will be different from the small and crowded *Pickering* pri-

vateer. But what if the Indiaman is attacked, Steve? Will you give up the ship?"

"Not while I can serve a gun, sir, and my legs are strong enough to stand. But we shall not go in search of the enemy."

This amused the British commander who chuckled in his beard. He had lost his ship but was too good a sportsman to be surly. Captain Haraden explained to him:

"You and your men will have to make your way to England as best you can, Captain Glendinning. I have your written pledges that you will not bear arms against the United States for the duration of the war. No doubt you will be able to find passage under a neutral flag."

The Englishman expressed his thanks for the courteous treatment and took his leave, promising to finish the game of chess on the morrow. Captain Haraden chatted a little longer and was delighted to note how much brighter and stronger Stephen already appeared. His cheek had a tint of red and his eyes danced. A genuine "haw, haw," greeted one of the captain's dignified jests. The malady of homesickness had ceased to overshadow the lad.

Within this same week he gazed through a long window and saw the *General Pickering,* his own ship, drop down the harbor and fill away to resume her cruise against the enemy. It bruised his heart to be denied

sailing in her but such was the fortune of war. Other brave men had been left behind and they were resting beneath the wooden crosses in a Spanish graveyard on a green hillside.

A few days after the departure of the *Pickering,* the commander of the Indiaman came to bid Stephen farewell. A Swedish vessel had entered port and would carry the British seamen to England. Stephen was much moved when his gray-bearded friend gave him a cane of ebony wood with a handle of carved ivory.

"In token of our truce," smiled the master of the *Ganges.* "And it may help you to get about the deck of—well, it is rather hard to say it—the deck of my own ship."

"Captain Haraden said it was an honor and a pleasure to engage you, sir," answered Stephen, "and I can't add anything to that but my deep thanks. If you land at Plymouth, by any chance, would you mind going to the Old Mill Prison and asking for a dear chum of mine named Benjamin Gerrish? He is there, I am quite sure. We escaped together and he must have been retaken. He will think me dead."

The generous Briton readily promised to do this, if he should have to journey to Plymouth for the purpose. His behavior illuminated the fact that men may fight to the death for a cause and still keep the spirit of chivalry aglow.

Stephen was left to wait impatiently for tidings from

the American prize master of the *Ganges* which still swarmed with artisans from the Bilbao dockyard. A courtly Spanish physician paid daily visits and Stephen managed to make him understand that he intended to go home in the prize. At first the physician protested, with gestures, but the patient was stubborn and would not listen. Better die contented in a good ship homeward bound than to linger in exile was the burden of Stephen's plaint.

The doctor went down to inspect the Indiaman and discovered that his impetuous invalid would suffer no discomforts. The permission was granted. Stephen looked as jolly as a sand-boy. He could not be kept in bed. Between spells of coughing he walked about the room with the aid of his ivory-headed cane.

At last the word came from the prize master. The hospitable Spanish family called it a most sorrowful parting. The señora hugged the youthful guest and the señoritas were desolated. The señor ordered his carriage with the coachman and postilion in red and yellow livery. In this grand manner did the humble seaman of the *Pickering* ride to the quay. A ship's yawl took him out to the *Ganges* where he was hoisted up the side in a boatswain's chair.

Most of the scars of battle had been removed and the Indiaman was clean and trim. Her upper spars had been sent down to make it easier for a small crew to handle sail. The prize master had been the captain of the

American merchant vessel wrecked on Cape Quejo. He impressed Stephen as a quiet and capable man suited rather for trading ventures than for privateering. Having been instructed by Captain Haraden to show the ailing lad every kindness, he had set aside a large cabin in the passengers' quarters. Compared with a hammock on the berth deck, it was vastly impressive, fit for the Grand Mogul himself.

In the cuddy, or dining-saloon, was the great polished table at which the British commander had presided in full-dress uniform, the passengers seated according to social or military rank. The furnishings were heavy and ornate, significant of the dignity of the Honorable East India Company. A cannon ball had smashed the teakwood sideboard and American gunnery had also demolished one of the handsome cupboards which had been filled with china and glassware.

The sailors of the prize crew, Yankees and Spaniards, selected their own quarters in the huge forecastle and the petty officers' rooms. They, too, were living in clover. And their simple minds were fairly staggered when the cooks ransacked the pantries. Casks of beer and ale, pork, bacon, tongues, oatmeal, barrels of herring and salmon, potatoes, lime juice, lemons, butter, dried fruits, ginger, jellies, and what not! Never had these mariners licked their chops over such heavenly provender as this. And in the slop chest more new clothes than they could wear out in a month of Sundays!

This crew was ready to take the *Ganges* around the world and to defy the devil and the deep sea.

Cheerily the American sailors walked the capstan bars around to the old tune of:

"I dreamt a dream the other night:
Low-lands, Low-lands, Hurrah, my John!
I dreamt I saw my own true love,
Low-lands, A-way-y."

CHAPTER XX

THE MYSTERY OF THE *GANGES*

ACCUSTOMED as he was to small ships, Stephen wondered how two dozen men could handle this East Indiaman which seemed to him so colossal. But they were contented to let her jog at her own gait and there was to be no cracking on sail. Safely she left the bold coast of Spain astern and sought the milder winds of a southerly course. When the great yards had to be swung, the watch below was turned out and all hands sweated at the sheets and braces. At the first hint of bad weather the unwieldy canvas was snugged down. This would be no record passage across the Atlantic. As the prize master said to Stephen:

"You are mortal young to have seen such brisk service in war but that is one fault you'll overcome before ever we cross Salem bar. And me with small children that will grow up and be married by then."

The crew made no complaints on this score. The comforts of the voyage were too good to be true. The prize master saw to it that there was no loafing or hard drinking. It was a smartly kept ship with decks scrubbed white and brasswork polished. It amused the

men when they found a station bill or list of the crew which the East Indiaman had formerly carried. Thereafter the Yankee tars addressed each other with elaborate formalities.

"Hi, poulterer, the second mate's servant wants to know why in blazes there ain't no fresh eggs this morning."

"'Cause the armorer snaggled 'em for the senior midshipman. Go tell the cooper to broach me a barrel o' beer."

"The master-at-arms sends his compliments and has anybody seen the sixth mate?"

"Throwin' dice with the chaplain and the caulker, he is, and the carpenter's mate lookin' on."

"Tell the butcher the meat is tough. The junior midshipmen and the coxswain are growlin' horrid about it."

"Have I the pleasure of addressin' the captain's cook or is this his valet?"

"The pastry baker, you swab."

"Then you're to be flogged, my man. Your jelly tarts is soggy and my stomach is delicate. Do you want to start a mutiny? And the cow is seasick and no cream for breakfast. What a beastly ship!"

It seems needless to say that Stephen Claghorn was gaining in strength and weight. The sea winds were as healing as balsam. Fewer coughing spells racked him. The easy motion of the ship lulled him through

long nights of slumber. His appetite was more normal. He had missed so many square meals, afloat and ashore, that the bountiful fare of the Indiaman inspired his enthusiasm. He grew plump so fast that he was in danger of being "Fatty" Claghorn again. At any rate, he would look more familiar to his mother's eyes.

There came a day when he could endure this pampered life no longer. At dinner he said to the prize master:

"There is nothing much the matter with a lad who can eat like this, sir. And I can climb all over the ship without losing my breath or stopping to rest. I had better go forward and join the men. That is where I belong. You will find one more seaman handy, and that is my rating."

"It is for you to say," replied the skipper. "Captain Haraden told me to treat you as a passenger, one of his own crew invalided home. Of course if you feel rugged enough ——"

"As rugged as I look, sir. In stormy weather I may have to favor myself a bit."

The prize master went on to explain:

"These are honest, willing lads of mine and the Spanish sailors might be worse. But they have not been in fighting ships. Privateers, I mean to say. I have fought some small actions, such as may befall any merchantman on deep-water voyages, but I lack experience of the gunnery and naval discipline of a private

armed ship. If attacked, we shall defend this rich Indiaman. What I have in mind is to place you in charge of the gunnery. Captain Haraden took my first officer and I have had to promote my second mate. In order to enforce respect you will have to be given an officer's rank. I will make you second mate and you can live aft with me. How old are you, Mr. Claghorn?"

"*Mister* Claghorn now!" delightedly exclaimed the lad. "I was sixteen when I left home, sir—seventeen now. My own father's age when he was a second mate in foreign trade."

"We all knew him. 'Tis a strong recommendation," the prize master returned. "You have enough seamanship to take charge of a watch. Very well, Mr. Claghorn. I would drill the men at the guns in their spare time. And I will help you knock out of their foolish noddles the notion that this voyage is like fiddling and dancing on a village green. They will jump when you say so. Even the Spaniards know your reputation—the youngster who walked out of Old Mill Prison and was picked up adrift and boarded the Indiaman all by himself and near blew her to smithereens with a hand-grenade."

"Well, I haven't been entirely idle since I sailed out of Salem," modestly admitted young Mr. Claghorn, with one of his expansive grins.

Tremendously elated by the honor thus bestowed, he

assumed his duties as second mate of the *Ganges*. The men were eager and willing to be shown how Jonathan Haraden had schooled his hard-hitting gun crews which were famous for rapidity of fire. Stephen hammered into the Spanish sailors the meaning of such routine orders as these:

" Cast off the tackles and breechings."
" Seize the breechings."
" Unstop the touch-hole."
" Ram home wad and cartridge."
" Shot the gun-wad."
" Run out the gun."
" Lay down handspikes and crows."
" Point your gun."
" Blow your match."
" FIRE."

When he had twenty men engaged in this team-play, Mr. Stephen Claghorn felt very warlike indeed. Instead of hoping to avoid every strange sail, he was anxious to show what the Indiaman could do to take care of herself. The sedate prize master laughed and said they ought to thank God for an empty ocean. It would be the luckiest voyage he had ever made if they could take this great ship safely across to Salem harbor.

A month at sea and they had sighted never a gleam of another vessel. Most of the time the weather was bright and not one severe storm. In fancy Stephen saw this lofty *Ganges* sailing in past Naumkeag Head with

all her bunting displayed, guns firing a salute, Salem flocking down to see her drop anchor off Derby Wharf. And on the quarter-deck, in spotless blue and white, a plump Mr. Claghorn, second mate, with a slightly crooked nose and a cheek scarred by powder burns.

Glory earned? Oh, yes, he had served his country in one or two lively affairs. He was one of Jonathan Haraden's seamen. Prize money? A ship and cargo worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Enough to make all hands rich.

On a breezy day in mid-ocean, the prize master told this light-hearted Mr. Claghorn to hoist the cover off the main hatch and let some fresh air into the hold. The ship leaked a certain amount and had to be pumped two hours daily. It was nothing to worry about but the dampness was bad for the cargo. A wind-sail pouring air into the hatch would help dry it out.

Stephen had a leisurely afternoon ahead of him. It was the first officer's watch. Right after dinner our hero decided to explore the cargo holds, now that the hatch was off. As second mate he wished to see how the cargo was stowed. Besides this he was curious to rummage among this precious freight gathered in lands so distant and romantic.

No Salem ship had then ventured as far as the Indian Ocean to challenge the jealous monopoly of the Honorable Company. Chests of tea, raw silk, musk, cam-

phor, and arrack, elephants' tusks, muslins and brocades, chinaware and lacquer! The ship's bill of lading had read like a page from Marco Polo.

Lantern in hand, Stephen went down a ladder into a gloomy cavern in which the tea chests were packed close together like a solid, level floor. These hundreds of tons of tea would be welcomed in the United States now that the supply from England was cut off. Stephen walked across this fragrant pavement and came to another timbered compartment filled with bales wrapped in matting and boxes bound with rattan strips. Climbing over them, he came to tiers of barrels which exhaled the pungent odor of gum camphor. It was fascinating to behold for himself all this treasure trove. The *Ganges* was like an immense warehouse stuffed with the wealth of China and the Indies.

The air in the hold was damp and heavy but not discomforting. The smell of it was aromatic, flavored with spices and sandal-wood. Stephen decided to extend his ramble farther forward, hoping to find the bundles of elephants' tusks. He stumbled and dropped the lantern. It was extinguished by the fall but this was a trifling mishap. He would return to the main hatch and climb the ladder.

Before making this journey, he sat down to rest with his back against a roll of burlaps. The exertion had tired him, in this close, odorous air. His legs ached and he felt short of breath. He yawned and was pleasantly

drowsy. He would roll into his bunk and take a nap before going on watch again.

His thoughts wandered in day-dreams, mostly of home, and his head began to nod. Why not take a nap where he was? It was cool and dark and soothing, and he liked the spicy smells. However, he might be needed on deck even though he was off duty.

He debated it a moment too long. The air was like a harmless drug. And he had lacked sleep during the preceding night. Also he was still a growing boy. His eyes closed. His chin dropped. What was the harm, he said to himself. A couple of hours tucked away in this quiet nook and he would feel as bright as a new dollar.

Another yawn—odd, but he couldn't hold his head up. Too much trouble to go poking along without a light in his lantern—feel more like it after—feel more like it after—after—by Jove, he must make the effort ——

Mr. Stephen Claghorn was gently snoring. But as he had remarked, there was no harm in it. Any alarm on deck would arouse him. And his time was his own until four o'clock in the afternoon, more than three hours away. He had been toiling so hard with his gun crews that his strength was overtaxed. This peaceful interlude was good for him.

When he awoke the sunlight still illumined the square frame of the main hatch. He had not slept past his

watch. This he noted as he crawled from his gloomy retreat. His head ached and he felt stupid but the breeze would blow it away. What troubled him more was a sense of chagrin that he should have yielded to his drowsy spell. Perhaps his long illness had something to do with it. However, the ship was quiet. Probably no one had missed him.

He made his way up the ladder and glanced at the sun. Not yet four o'clock but near it. He hurried aft to relieve the first officer. Mounting the quarter-deck, he stood still, as if paralyzed. He could have sworn that his cap lifted his hair from his head. Was he awake or still dreaming?

The broad quarter-deck was deserted. No helmsmen at the great steering wheel. No officer on watch. Not a living soul.

Mr. Stephen Claghorn was a second mate who looked like a dumfounded idiot. Instinctively he looked aloft. The ship was running easily before the wind with yards squared, as when he had left her. He blinked at the steering wheel again. Lashings had been looped over the spokes to hold the rudder amidships.

The thing was absolutely incredible. Not a solitary seaman of the first officer's watch was anywhere visible. There was no sound of a human voice. Smoke blew from the iron pipe above the galley roof. Stephen ran forward to the galley as fast as his legs could propel him. The wisp of smoke was like a friendly beacon.

There was no white-aproned cook in the galley. It was as empty as the quarter-deck. Fire was in the brick oven. Two big kettles bubbled and steamed. One contained beef and potatoes, the other a boiled pudding in a bag. Supper was merrily cooking for a crew which had ceased to exist, so far as Stephen was able to discover.

The galley was bewitched. He backed away from the oven and fled on deck. The forecastle was his destination. He was afraid to enter it. Something dreadful might leap out at him. Panic rode the gallant young second mate of the *Ganges*. You could have knocked him down with a humming-bird's feather.

Not a seaman was in the large forecastle. It was like a haunted cavern. Clothing was strewn about as usual, oilskins swinging from pegs, shirts flung across a line. In a room used by the Spanish sailors a guitar had been left upon the lid of a sea-chest. On the floor was an empty bottle and two tin cups half-filled with red wine.

Sick with the mystery of it, Stephen went aft again and down into the main cabin. In the prize master's room the canvas-bound log-book was open on the desk. The last entry was unfinished.

" Wind moderate, E.by.N. Course E.by.N. Speed six knots, noon meridian. Opened main hatch to air cargo. First officer reported . . ."

The prize master's tobacco pipe lay beside the log-book. It was his custom, when smoking in his room, to

keep a candle lighted in a bracket on the wall. He was a clumsy hand with flint and steel. The candle was still burning, although guttered low. It was worse than an empty ship. These tokens of human presence, so uncannily suggestive, made it more like a ghostly ship. Stephen concluded that he might feel less unhappy on deck. He preferred open spaces.

The next discovery was that the ship's boats were undisturbed. Not one of them had been moved from its chocks. Then it was impossible that the crew had abandoned the ship. And there had not been noise enough to arouse Stephen sleeping in the hold, with the main hatch open. No bloodshed, no sign of disorder or violence! Two dozen men and a competent prize master had quietly vanished.

Stephen sat down by the steering wheel and lugubriously reflected:

"If it was a British crew I should say that the devil had flown away with 'em all. Strange things do happen at sea, as my dad used to say, but I'll swear he was never afoul of a hi-diddle like this. I'd know more about it if I hadn't gone to sleep in the hold like a dummy."

He cast off the lashings of the steering wheel. With all his strength he could not pull the spokes over to make the ship mind her helm while running before the wind. It was a task for two brawny quartermasters. As for doing anything whatever with the yards or sails, this was utterly hopeless.

"She will yaw once too often," he said to himself, "and roll herself broadside on. But this wind is not strong enough to hurt. If she blows some canvas away, good riddance."

This was all the comfort the lone young second mate could find in the situation. The mystery was too appalling and inscrutable for him so much as to attempt an explanation. He was in a feeble-minded condition. What concerned him even more was that he was adrift in a derelict ship in mid-ocean. Staunch and well-found though she might be, he was helpless to bring her into port. He was master, mate, and crew of a fabulously rich East Indiaman which might go to the bottom in the next gale of wind.

CHAPTER XXI

ADVENTURES OF A LONE SECOND MATE

STEPHEN'S black cloud of trouble had one small glint of a silver lining. This he realized after a hearty supper of beef stew and pudding which he ate in the galley because the long table in the main cabin was too solitary. After all, he was much better off than a shipwrecked sailor on a raft or a castaway on a desert island. He could live in ease and comfort with not the slightest anxiety about starvation. In fact, this disaster had an air of luxury. Then, too, the weather might continue to be kind to the drifting *Ganges*. She was in southern waters where for long intervals light winds and calms could be expected. Sooner or later some vessel would sight her, hopefully reflected Stephen, perhaps an American privateer. Of course she might drift far enough south to be trapped in the weedy stagnation of the Sargasso Sea which was shunned by all mariners.

This was a disturbing thought. Stephen saw himself existing for years and years, until a hoary beard hung to his knees and he died of old age. But he tried to banish such dismal visions and bravely resolved to take

the days as they came. He had found himself in other alarming predicaments and had lived to tell the tale. Like a true sailor he worried not so much over himself as for the splendid ship, staunch below and aloft, which he was powerless to aid. This impressed him as being a tragedy so mournful that it moved him almost to tears. He could neither steer nor handle sail.

During this first night alone he would not quit the deck. The empty cabins were too spooky. He was sensible enough to conclude that the prize master and his crew had not suddenly gone daft and jumped overboard. And while sea serpents were huge and dreadful creatures, according to forecastle tales, they could not very well crawl over the side of an Indiaman and gobble the men alive.

If the ship's company had been taken off by another vessel, what could be the reason for it? That such a prize as this should be deliberately forsaken was beyond all belief. Such thoughts as these ran circles in Stephen's mind. Explanation eluded him. He had never felt less like sleep.

Moreover, the ship was no longer running with sails filled. Deprived of guidance she had fallen into the trough of the sea and was rolling drunkenly. The canvas had ceased to steady her. The topsails thrashed with a noise like thunder. There was an incessant banging of chains and sheets and blocks. It was enough to break a mariner's heart to see a good ship so cruelly

abused. There was this consolation, however, that unless it came on to blow hard the *Ganges* would endure a deal of punishment. Her spars were massive and the sails and rigging new.

Late in the night she squared off again, the breeze filled the topsails, and she ran steadily for two hours like a living creature bravely trying to extricate itself. Then she wallowed again, all masterless and forlorn. Stephen knew that, in daylight, such strange behavior as this would attract the notice of any other ship which might pass within sighting distance. Trust a seaman's eye to discern that something was gravely amiss. The *Ganges* had need to fly no signals of distress. Her behavior told the story of her plight.

A day passed and then another. Idleness would have been intolerable. Stephen could not forget that he was Mr. Claghorn, second mate. He stood his regular watches and slept in four-hour stretches, rousing out of sound sleep by force of habit. In the canvas-covered log-book he made the customary entries, beginning:

"4 P. M.—Found all hands missing and took command of ship. So ends this day."

He washed his dishes in the galley and scrubbed the tiled floor. It would not be a slack ship, if he could help it. During tours of inspection he saw that every rope was neatly coiled on its pin. The deck-houses needed a coat of white paint. He calculated that this would employ him for a week or so. When at leisure

he picked at the guitar and sang all the sea ditties he could remember.

An older man would have fretted far more. At seventeen, Stephen Claghorn found life colored with the boyish zest of adventure. He was in supreme command of a great East Indiaman, the finest ship he had ever seen. Growing more accustomed to the solitude, he dined in the saloon, seated at the head of the mahogany table and using the silver plate engraved with the crest of the Honorable Company. Now and then he paced the quarter-deck, figure erect, hands clasped behind him, turning to scowl at an imaginary quartermaster. Play-acting was much better than moping or yielding to phantom terrors.

Despite all these efforts, the loneliness and uncertainty of it were tormenting beyond words. A lad more high-strung or unaccustomed to the mischances of the sea might have gone to pieces under such a strain as this. Stephen maintained a certain courage and cheerfulness because such was his temperament. More than this, he came of seafaring stock which had learned to regard shipwreck and disaster as in the day's work. Every trading voyage was beset with perils unknown to later generations of American mariners.

Still hopeful at the end of a week of it, Stephen began to discover what it meant to be nervous. Small sounds startled him. He glanced over his shoulder when he entered the cabin. His sleep was fitful and

uneasy. He swept the horizon with a spy-glass until his eyes ached. It was getting difficult to apply himself to the tasks which he had assigned himself to do.

When after all this time he saw the first distant sail lift against the blue, his hand trembled so that he could not steady the glass. Very slowly it appeared to grow larger, this blessed sail which he had so yearned to descry. His heart leaped for ecstasy. It could be nothing else than an American ship. Fate could not be so wicked as to betray him into the hands of the enemy, after all the tribulations he had passed through.

Swiftly Stephen painted bright pictures of fancy. With a new prize crew of Yankee seamen, the *Ganges* would resume her voyage and enter Salem harbor in triumph. Louder huzzas for the young second mate who had stood by the ship!

He found a support for the spy-glass and gazed at the approaching vessel until his vision was blurred. The upper sails were patched and dingy but they had the graceful cut of a New England sail-loft. The canvas of a Britisher would set more clumsily. The vessel appeared to be a small merchantman. She was evidently steering to discover what was amiss with the towering Indiaman which floundered over the ocean in such an erratic manner.

Stephen wavered betwixt hope and doubt. The lump in his throat was as big as an apple. The air was clear

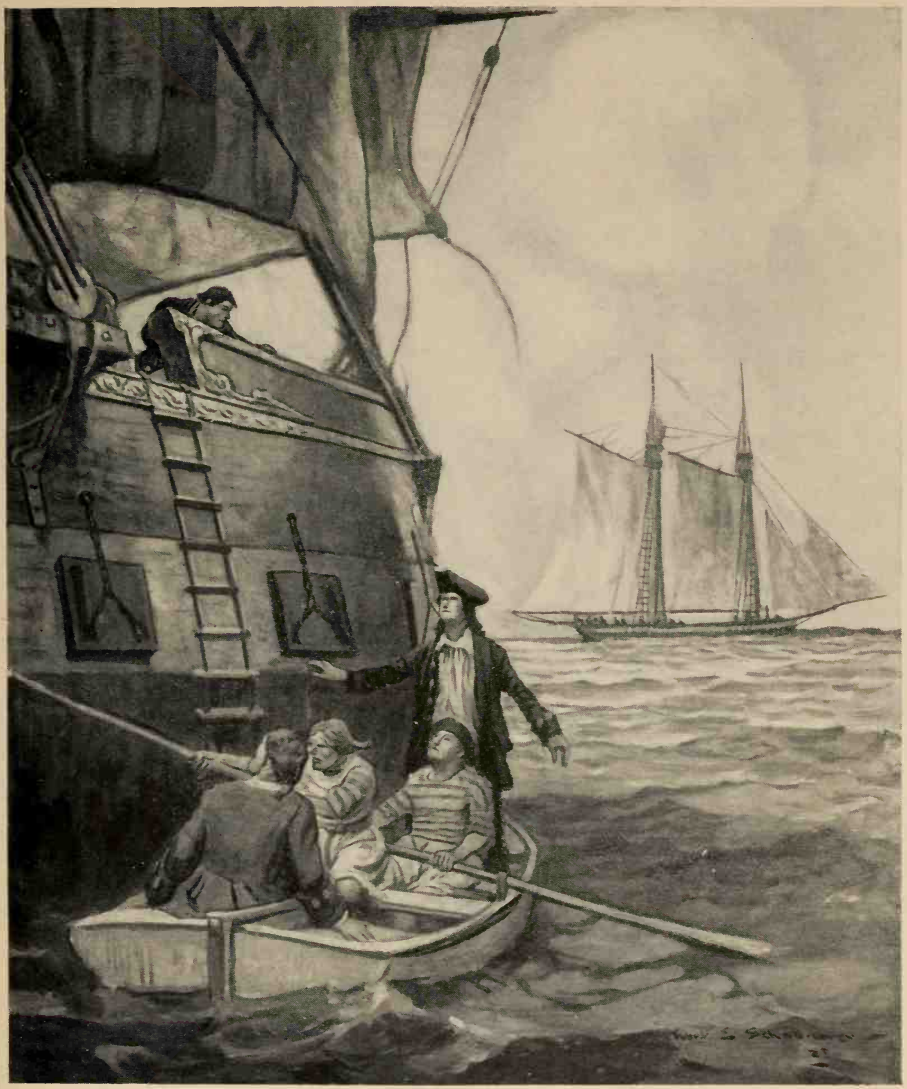
and the breeze steady. In a little while the two ships would be close together.

Stephen's happy anticipations were doomed to be shattered. The first shock came when he perceived that this stranger was no plodding merchant trader. As soon as she had come near enough, he saw that her deck was literally crowded with guns and men. Never had he beheld so heavy a battery carried by a craft of this tonnage. Not only in the waist were the black muzzles ranged close together but also on the forecastle head and poop.

At the carriages were clustered the men to serve them, scores of sailors waiting for the word. There was something ferocious in the aspect of this sea-worn vessel with her unpainted hull and shabby gear. A privateer? This rover was more like a pirate and it would have been no surprise to see the black flag flown aloft.

Stephen Claghorn had lost all desire to be rescued. He vastly preferred to be left alone in the *Ganges*. Presently he saw the red ensign of England climb to a gaff. Oddly enough, he felt relief because it was not the skull and cross-bones. At any rate, he would not have to walk a plank.

This was very slender comfort indeed. The *Ganges* was about to be taken by the enemy. And a most ruffianly lot of them! This gallant young second mate, a veteran who had sailed with Jonathan Haraden, was of a mind to fight his ship by firing such guns as he



At a Hail from the Boat He Went to the Rail

could bring to bear, instead of meek surrender. But prudence got the upper hand of his hot-headed valor. It was for him to make the best of an exceedingly bad bargain. He decided to surrender with the dignity befitting his rank as acting commander of the *Ganges*.

Well out of range, the disreputable British privateer, or whatever it was, ran up into the wind and hung with canvas shaking. A boat was lowered. Without hesitation it was rowed toward the side of the derelict East Indiaman. Stephen Claghorn eyed its progress with feelings of profound woe and chagrin. At a hail from the boat he reluctantly walked to the rail to gaze down. If he refused to lower a rope ladder, these outlaws would climb in over the bow.

Something was queer with his eyesight. He was so agitated that he all but collapsed in his tracks. Being marooned in the *Ganges* had made him light-headed. In the bow of the boat was a figure fondly familiar but it simply could not be alive and real. That solemn visage and lanky frame? Impossible to mistake it. By the great horn spoon, this was no ghostly visitation. Master Benjamin Gerrish in the flesh!

The schoolmaster of Salem was gazing upward with an expression so foolish and bedazed that it matched the countenance of the lost comrade, Stephen Claghorn. They were as dumb as two wooden men. Presently the spell was broken. The deck of the *Ganges* rang with the well-known Claghorn " haw, haw, haw! "

Ben Gerrish detested rope ladders but he ran up this one like a fly on a wall. Over the rail he tumbled, into Stephen's arms, and they danced like two mad dervishes. Dignity forsook the Indiaman's sacred quarter-deck. Having clouted the schoolmaster's head and almost cracked his ribs, Stephen sputtered:

" Welcome aboard, old trump! God alone knows where you came from, or how—but what matters it? You will stay and dine with the captain which is me. Who the deuce is with you? "

Master Gerrish ran his fingers through his long black hair and stared, goggle-eyed, at the jubilant lad. All he could find to say was:

" Stephen, you do surprise me. When last we met, or parted, to be precise, I was falling off a roof in Plymouth. And you were a mason's apprentice. What in the world are you doing with this enormous ship? "

" Waiting for you, old lubber. Here now, unscramble your scholarly wits and explain your evil company, for yon rascally vessel is no place for you."

A solid young man with a jaw like a rock had climbed out of the boat and sat with a leg over the ship's rail. Nothing could seriously disturb him but in this situation he was excited enough to exclaim:

" Barnacles and blue blazes! 'Tis the fat Claghorn boy that was in prison with us. Evil company be blowed, Ben. What does he mean by that? "

" Henry Holter, as I live," cried Stephen, more

muddled than ever. "How many more guests for dinner?"

"Captain Silas Ropes, master of the low rakish schooner in the offing," answered Ben Gerrish. "He will bring the whole crew aboard to live with you. By your leave, we'll finish the voyage in luxury."

"Fetch 'em all," cried the undaunted Stephen. "The more the merrier. I can feed a hundred, if you will furnish the cooks. Good heavens, Ben, have you got the whole lot from Old Mill Prison aboard that dissolute packet of yours? She is fairly jammed with men."

"Only three Americans," was the amazing reply. "The rest of them are Britishers."

"And you have tamed 'em all, Ben? The prodigious schoolmaster and his terrible comrades! Why, I saw all those guns and men with my own eyes before the schooner was hove to."

"Yes, they are all there, and obedient, let me tell you," said the modest Master Gerrish.

"I make 'em toe the mark," put in Henry Holter. "And so does Silas Ropes. It's an American ship, from keel to truck, you can bet your boots on that."

Stephen stared at them, speechless. He was awe-struck. These were three heroes beyond compare. They were not to be regarded as ordinary mortals. In comparison Hercules and Jack the Giant Killer seemed like mere children. Still entranced and dazzled, Stephen saw the schoolmaster mount the cabin roof and wave an

arm as a signal to Captain Silas Ropes to bring his vessel closer.

Silas obeyed very tardily. His crew appeared to be asleep. Only two men were handling sail. This was a curious circumstance. However, the shabby schooner managed to work into a position close to leeward of the *Ganges*. And now Stephen's jaw dropped. Presently he began to laugh and he kept on laughing until his sides were sore.

Dummies! Counterfeits! All those British seamen so quiet and steady at the guns were dummies, sailors' clothing, odds and ends of rough garments all stuffed with straw or something else, and topped with tarpaulin hats.

That powerful battery of guns from bow to stern? Only two of them on a side were genuine. All the others were dummy cannon, pieces of spar sawed the proper length, painted black, and mounted on clumsy carriages without wheels. As a formidable cruising privateer the schooner was a pretence, an elaborate jest wonderfully contrived.

Fidgeting about on the schooner's deck, Captain Silas Ropes was manifestly irritated. He shouted in fretful accents:

" The Indiaman ahoy! What in time ails you idiots? Cuttin' capers on the quarter-deck and me left with Dick Webb and one sailor. Is that ship full of rum? What's the matter there? "

" Shake a leg and join us, Silas," roared Henry Holter. " Bring all hands. Let the rotten schooner go to Davy Jones."

" What say, Henry? Who's that broad-beamed boy you found aboard? Looks to me like young Claghorn that plugged the hole in the prison wall. How is that ship? Well found? Where in tarnation is the crew? She looks mussed aloft, but we can soon fix that."

" Fit for the Rajah of Bengal himself, Silas. I'll come off in the boat for you. Don't be late for dinner, whatever you do."

Henry Holter was rowed back to the schooner by his two British sailors who had been waiting in the boat. There was no more delay. Silas Ropes promptly slid over the bulwark with a bundle under his arm. Behind him came Mr. Richard Webb and the third British sailor. There was no sentimental reluctance at leaving the schooner to her fate. On the contrary, Captain Silas Ropes stood up in the boat and shook his fist at her.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE WAY TO RECRUIT SEAMEN

NO sooner did Silas Ropes set foot aboard the *Ganges* than he was the master mariner in command. His curiosity could wait. To see a fine ship reeling about the ocean in this helpless state jarred all his professional instincts. He cocked an eye aloft and then stepped to the binnacle to glance at the compass. This was routine habit. He had to pause and consider what to do next. Never had he seen so big a ship with so small a crew. No need to muster and count them. He had seven men, all told.

Stephen Claghorn thought it advisable to announce:

"I am the second mate, if you please, sir. I took charge of the ship when the prize master left her. You will find it properly entered in the log."

"Second mate, hey?" exclaimed Silas, with his quizzical grin. "And there was a prize crew that got away from you, *Mister* Claghorn? I'm surprised. I figgered that you had sailed this far by yourself. Um-m, I seem to be all cluttered up with officers and almighty shy of fo'mast hands. Well, the trick is to get this vessel under way and on a course to the west'ard. Courses and topsails all set? Good! By gum and ginger, we'll have to swing those yards somehow."

He stationed Ben Gerrish and Dick Webb at the steering wheel and told the others to follow him. These were Henry Holter and Stephen and the three British sailors. In order to swing the huge main-yard he led the sheet forward and took two or three turns around a capstan. Then they manned the bars and walked her round until the vast mainsail felt the pressure of the wind. It was a simpler task to trim the headsails flat. Very slowly the ship responded. Stephen shouted that she was beginning to steer.

With the aid of a capstan, Silas Ropes hauled the fore and mizzen yards to suit him. The topsails were a task almost as severe and tedious, but pluck and ingenuity were not to be denied. They toiled for several hours before the stately *Ganges* was once more plowing the long road to Salem harbor.

The dead ship was alive again. So far so good, said Captain Ropes, but what could they do if the weather turned foul or the wind blew against them? They could never reef those wallopin' big topsails and it would take a whole day to tack ship. Henry Holter suggested that they could discuss it to better advantage at the dinner table. What this ship offered to eat, said he, was enough to make a man weep like a baby.

Stephen volunteered to act as cook for this banquet, which was a great condescension on the part of the second mate of an East Indiaman. That scapegrace Briton, Richard Webb, elected to set the cabin table

with the fine linen, the silver plate, the Canton china, and the crystal glass of the Honorable Company. He seemed familiar with such luxury, strange to say, and it was inferred that he had seen better days. A black sheep, perhaps. It was a festal board, with decanters of brown sherry and ruddy port to grace it, and dishes of candied fruits and nuts and raisins.

Stephen yielded the head of the table to Captain Silas Ropes. They found it necessary to dine in relays. Two British sailors were at the wheel, with hungry Henry Holter in charge of the deck until relieved. Dick Webb insisted upon officiating as butler, a napkin on his arm, and gave a very finished performance. It happened therefore that Stephen and Ben Gerrish were able to compare experiences and pelt each other with eager questions while Captain Ropes shoved in an oar now and then. When it came to mention of the Scilly Islands, Captain Ropes interrupted gustily and there was no stopping him.

" A mariner's job that was," said he, " and this lubberly Ben Gerrish 'ud snarl it in the telling. In thick weather and a heavy blow we drove ashore. 'Twas no fault of mine, for I have forgotten more navigation than this conceited schoolmaster ever knew. The schooner washed across a reef in the night but didn't break her back. We hung on and the Scilly islanders took us off next morning when the sea went down. *Fortune's Favorite* was her name and we were all of that to be

alive. The schooner was a wreck, masts gone by the board, planking stove, water in the hold, but she rested on the bottom and couldn't founder.

" Dick Webb knew some of these island folk, having dealt with 'em on smuggling cruises in this same schooner. It was no concern of theirs if we were Americans and escaped prisoners of war. We were partners of his in the contraband trade, said Dick Webb, and the rest of the crew had been lost when the schooner piled up on the reef. We had a cargo of Madeira wines and tobacco, in casks and hogsheads, and it was worth salvaging. And so we drove a bargain with those honest islanders. They were to help us float the schooner and careen her on the beach. It was taking a long chance that she could be patched up to go to sea again. By Judas, we were ready to sail in a coffin. We agreed to pay the Scilly islanders with the cargo of the schooner."

" Two months we toiled as ship-carpenters and riggers," sighed Master Gerrish. " And this Silas Ropes was an infernal tyrant of a slave driver."

" I made a useful workman of you," scoffed Silas. " Lucky I knew something besides the science of navigation. Well, we sawed and hammered and spliced and caulked, and the islanders lent a hand. Then I mended the sails, or some of them, and dickered for new canvas. I made a good job of cutting it, and the old hooker looked as if she could step lively, provided the bottom didn't drop out of her in the first breeze o' wind. A

crazy contraption she was to cross the Western Ocean in. As true as I sit here, when we were 'most ready to sail, Ben Gerrish sneezed in the forepeak and she up and opened a new leak."

Stephen listened with the liveliest interest. He could see Silas Ropes driving the work along, regardless of the odds against him, determined somehow to win the tussle with misfortune. The Scilly islanders had made the acquaintance of a master of men. It was an epic of adventurous endeavor but the heroes were not in the least aware that they had done anything out of the ordinary.

"What about all those dummy guns and men?" blurted Stephen. "How did you invent them?"

"Ask the schoolmaster," answered Captain Ropes. "He is a shrewd hand at stratagems, I'll admit that much."

Master Gerrish now held the centre of the stage. He wore an air of conscious pride. Having meekly endured the abuse of Silas Ropes, he would now show Stephen that he merited some measure of praise himself.

"We had to throw the schooner's guns over when we tried to float her," he explained, "and we could fish only four of them from the deep water inside the reef. And of what use would the battery have been with only seven of us to fight it? The thought occurred to me, Steve, that if our vessel should appear to be heavily gunned and manned, most other craft would be likely

to let her alone. There was some clothing in the schooner after—er—after Captain Enoch Crooke and his ungodly seamen had left us so hastily in the bay of Penzance. And by means of judicious bartering among the Scilly islanders, wines and tobacco for old jackets and breeches and hats, I was able to manufacture a large number of able seamen."

"But how the dickens did you make them stand up to their duty?" laughed Stephen. "I could have sworn they were all alert at the guns."

"We were careful not to run too close to your big Indiaman, as you probably observed. I stuffed the jackets and breeches with oakum, bits of old sail-cloth, and tobacco leaves from the hogsheads which had been spoiled by salt water. Limber twigs of willow served to give them backbone which seems so necessary in this turbulent life at sea. My brave sailors were lashed in position with spun yarn and fisherman's twine. Canvas masks and tarpaulin hats completed the illusion."

"But how could you do all this?" demanded Stephen. "There was a vast deal of work in it."

"Oh, the children of the island helped me. They viewed it as a lark. And I told them foolish tales of fairies while their deft little fingers toiled."

"And the dummy cannon?"

"They were sawed from the schooner's broken spars. And there were other wrecks enough, God knows, on

those wicked reefs to give me material for my make-believe ordnance."

"This fantastic stuff served the purpose," exclaimed Captain Silas Ropes. "We were chased more than once by armed ships but they sheered off at the sight of our terrifying decks. Ben Gerrish saved us from capture, not a doubt of it."

"Well done, old Socrates," cried Stephen. "In my opinion, a king's cruiser would have eyed your devilish schooner with respect. I can swear you scared me out of a year's growth."

The time of day was late afternoon when the banquet in the cabin of the *Ganges* came to an end. They went on deck to find the ship holding steadily on her course. Presently Captain Ropes shaded his eyes with his hand and stood gazing into the westward. He saw a sail. The sight was most unwelcome. The Indiaman preferred to pursue her solitary way.

"One thing is sure," said Captain Ropes. "Under reduced canvas this lumbering old ark can't run away from anything. And as soon as that vessel yonder sees that we have nothing set above the topsails she will feel no fear of being chased by us. I'll take it as a favor if she will kindly mind her own business."

"If it is an enemy ship we may be mistaken for an Indiaman in service as a troop transport from England to America," ventured Stephen.

"With that buster of a dinner under my belt, I'll not

worry until I have to," grinned Silas. The schoolmaster applauded this sentiment.

The two ships were approaching each other. Unless the courses were shifted they would pass no more than a mile apart. Continued scrutiny persuaded Captain Ropes that the stranger was under British colors. She had the marks of a trader from the West Indies. There was nothing in her appearance to occasion alarm. The *Ganges* was in no danger of attack.

Suddenly the shrewd Silas Ropes slapped his leg and shouted:

" Hanged if I let you get away with all the tricks, Ben Gerrish. This ship of ours needs more men and needs 'em almighty bad. If we can't beg perhaps we can steal."

He shoved the two men away from the steering wheel. Soon the *Ganges* was running wild, spilling the breeze from her sails, floundering about in aimless fashion as when Stephen had been alone in her. Again she appeared to be an abandoned ship.

" I hate to mishandle her in this scandalous fashion," said Silas Ropes, " but no great harm will happen in a wind like this."

He ordered all hands below. They obeyed in some bewilderment. In the cabin Captain Ropes proceeded to unfold his plot.

" This British trader, as I suspect her to be, will heave to and ask herself what's wrong with the Indiaman.

Here's a tall Company ship acting as if not a soul was board. A darned queer kettle o' fish! The next thing will be to send a boat off to investigate. Sailormen are always curious critturs. Half a dozen men or so will come off."

"And you will kidnap 'em, Silas?" grunted Henry Holter. "But their skipper'll be looking on from his own deck. If he sees a scrimmage, what's to prevent his sending his whole crew to the rescue? And then where are we? Scuppered, by jingo!"

"Not at all, Henry. Say not so," retorted Silas, his eyes puckered with mirth. "We set a bait to catch 'em. Here, you Claghorn boy, clear this table and spread more grub on it—lashings of it—more lambs' tongues and pickles and sweet biscuit—more pork sausage and apple sauce—more port and sherry, and be sure to add a bottle of rum."

Dick Webb, the Englishman, had listened and looked on with an amused smile on his hard, cynical face. To him Captain Ropes now spoke sternly:

"I have your word of honor, young man, that you will be true to me and to this ship till the end of the voyage. What about your three British sailors? Can I trust 'em if more men of their own breed are fetched aboard?"

"Aye, sir, you can," stoutly answered Dick Webb. "They are no more anxious to go back to England than I am. Being hanged as mutineers at Execution Dock

no more appeals to their fancy than when they signed on with you in Penzance Bay. You need not fear we'll turn against you if you bring more English seamen to this ship."

"Then I guess we can manage it," contentedly exclaimed Silas Ropes. "There's eight of us now and we can hold the upper hand. You will arm yourselves, cutlasses and pistols, but I hope there'll be no use for 'em. Plate and knife and heaps of good vittles ought to win this engagement."

They laughed and stowed themselves in the smaller cabins where they could watch the trading vessel through the windows. As had been anticipated, the spectacle of a great East India Company's ship rolling this way and that, sails in confusion, was enough to arouse curiosity and interest. From all indications, the crew had quit her or all hands had been stricken down by some mortal plague.

An hour passed before the hidden watchers at the cabin windows of the *Ganges* saw the small merchant ship almost abeam of them. She was close enough for her own people to observe that not a living soul moved upon the Indiaman's deck. Some mysterious tragedy of the sea was indicated.

"Ah, ha, she backs her main-yard and hoists a boat out," chuckled Silas Ropes from his place of concealment. "There was no resisting the bait. Hooked, by gum and ginger! And the flag she flies is the red rag

of old England. Fair game for us, eh, lads? But never was a reception so courteous prepared for an enemy, I'll swear to that. Bottles instead of bullets!"

"All the horrors of war they're liable to find is a collection of stomach-aches," remarked Henry Holter.

"Count the boat's crew when they shove off," exclaimed Silas. "Your eyes are younger than mine, Henry."

"One—two—three—four—five—six—seven. Any more would be too many. Six at the oars and one to steer,—the mate, most likely."

"God save me from any more mates," grumbled Captain Ropes. "I shall be overrun with 'em. There's you, Henry, and this Dick Webb, and *Mister* Stephen Claghorn, and Ben Gerrish itching to be called the navigator. Another mate will spoil my temper."

CHAPTER XXIII

HAPPY PRISONERS OF WAR

THE boat from the English merchant vessel pulled straight for the side of the *Ganges*. The men were seen to be poorly clad and their faces had a pinched look. Apparently they had suffered privations. It must have been a hard voyage and scanty rations. The rope ladder had been left convenient for them to climb to the deck of the Indiaman. One by one they toiled up and swung themselves over the bulwark.

Soon Captain Ropes and his comrades hiding below could hear the shouts of wonderment as the visitors tramped to and fro upon the deserted quarter-deck. Then the voices died as they ran forward to investigate. Silence reigned for some time. Then the visitors trooped aft. Stephen Claghorn had bethought himself to lock the galley and the other deck-houses. This was done with a purpose. Hungry men would have to search elsewhere.

As was bound to happen, the puzzled boat's crew decided to explore the main cabin. One of them wandered down ahead of the others. The wide door into the din-

ing-saloon had been left open. This humble seafarer stood spellbound, enraptured. It was to be conjectured that his emotions were beyond the power of speech.

The long table, the snowy napery, the gleaming silver, the glittering glass! Food and drink beyond all dreams of earthly bliss! It was sheer magic. A mystery? What cared this happy British seafarer? There was the gorgeous feast and wine and rum to wash it down. It beckoned with a wonderful allurement, after a meagre diet of flinty salt-horse and weevilly biscuit. Here was a spectacle too good to be true. Almost overpowered, this famished ocean tramp called up to the deck, in tremulous accents:

"Ahoy, you lucky dogs! Shake a leg and tumble below afore the vision fades away. Strike me blind, but we've run afoul of Buckin'ham Palace on the king's birthday."

Three of his companions came rushing down, almost swooned for joy, and rushed up on deck again to summon the others. Just then Stephen Claghorn, tucked away in a near-by cabin, was unlucky enough to cough. He had been trying to stifle it until he was black in the face.

The greedy visitor at the dining-table spun around like a top, in a fit of ghastly terror. He made no sound, being too frightened for that, but stealthily retreated, with long strides, in the direction of the exit to the deck. Now he knew that this ship was bewitched.

Happy Prisoners of War

Out of a small cabin popped Henry Holter as though fired from a gun. Before the panic-smitten British tar could utter a yell, Henry's two hands were clasping his throat. By the neck he was swiftly and silently dragged into the nearest room where Ben Gerrish was quick to close the door. Again stillness reigned in the great cabin and dining-saloon of the East Indiaman. The trap was set and waiting.

One behind the other, the six remaining visitors came trooping down. All they saw was that marvellous table spread for a feast. They stood staring at it. Presently, however, they missed the companion who had first discovered the miracle. They had left him gloating and talking to himself. Where was he now? Well they knew that never would he have left that table of his own accord. A hawser could not have dragged him away from it.

An infernal queer business, the whole thing, and this was too much! The devil had flown away with poor Bill. A haunted ship, and it would be no surprise to see a flock of mermaids a-settin' on their fishy tails in the carven chairs and a-playin' of their golden harps to snare the souls of honest sailors.

While these six unhappy seafarers wavered and muttered, the ship lurched heavily. Plates and decanters slid with a crash. Frightened as they were, and on the point of flight, the six seamen rushed to the rescue. Here was slathers of real food and drink. To let it be

wrecked would be a crime. Forgotten was their missing comrade. He could jolly well look after himself.

A moment later the saloon was noisy with laughter and the rattle of dishes and glasses clinking festively. From a door ajar peered the lean countenance of Captain Silas Ropes. On tiptoe he crossed the floor and slammed tight the heavy double doors of the dining-saloon. The brass locks clicked. The six convivial seamen were securely trapped. It was one way to recruit a crew without fuss or bloodshed.

From the other side of the locked doors came startled cries and curses. These were followed by a great commotion, hammering on the doors and walls, upsetting the furniture. This disturbed Silas Ropes not in the least. He called his companions from their hiding-places and told them:

"They can stomp and rave all they like. It won't be for long. No troubles are big enough to hold those sailormen back from that almighty spread of vittles. Where's the odd one that you grabbed when he scudded to give the alarm, Henry? As soon as they quiet down, we'll toss him in to join the party. Poor cuss! You jammed his windpipe but I'll bet he is still able to swallow."

"I was careful not to disable him," said Henry. "We need all seven of these bullies in the fo'castle. What now? Do we sit tight?"

"Stay here with me," replied Silas. "We mustn't

show our heads on deck. Take a squint through a window and see what the British merchant ship is doing. If I can read the skipper's mind he is wondering what has become of his seven men."

The trading vessel still rocked to leeward of the *Ganges*. The men left on board were standing with their elbows on the bulwark, ranged all in a row, while they bobbed their heads in earnest conversation. It was easy to comprehend that they were discussing the riddle of their seven shipmates who had vanished from the deck of the Indiaman.

To Silas Ropes and his companions there was nothing tedious in the period of waiting in the main cabin. From beyond the locked doors came sounds of high revelry. No more rage and rebellion among those kidnapped Britishers, nor any fear of perfidious mermaids! They were boisterously resigned to their fate, whatever it might be.

It seemed perfectly safe to open the doors and pitch the seventh man in to join them. He was complaining bitterly that those blighted guzzlers would drain every drop. Henry Holter took him by the scruff of the neck while Silas Ropes guarded the doors with a cutlass in his fist. This was a superfluous precaution. A robust seaman at the head of the table was beating time with his glass while they all sang with tremendous gusto:

" Come all you sailors bold,
Lend an ear, lend an ear:
Come all you sailors bold, lend an ear:
'Tis of our admiral's fame,
Brave Benbow was his name,
How he fought on the main,
You shall hear."

When the seventh captive flew into the room, head over heels, he was welcomed with riotous rejoicing. They hailed him as one returned from the grave. As Silas Ropes locked them in again, he said a true word:

" We'd have a bloody fight on our hands if we tried to put them off this ship. It's as pretty a capture of seven prisoners of war as a man could imagine."

" A most comical engagement with the enemy, as it turns out," observed Henry Holter.

At the end of an hour, the British merchant trader fired a gun as a signal of recall. There was no response from the *Ganges* which still towered from the sea with never a sign of life on her decks. The bewildered merchant vessel moved in closer and fired another gun. Her seven men had gone without a trace. Night was coming on.

A little boat, like a fisherman's dory was lowered from the davits astern. Two men embarked. They rowed without haste, frequently pausing to argue, as if sent against their will. When he saw them coming, Captain Ropes ran to the doors of the dining-saloon, rapped for

attention with the butt of a pistol, and shouted to the revelers:

"Silence, you rascals! Another peep until I say the word and my men will shoot down through the skylight."

The threat was effective. The captives were as quiet as mice. The little dory came alongside and then turned to pass all the way round the hull of the *Ganges*. The two men at the oars were vainly trying to find some clue to the mystery. At length the dory was made fast to the rope ladder. One man concluded to climb on board. It was very courageous of him.

Sheltered from view behind the high bulwark, Henry Holter was waiting for him. There was no scuffle, no noise. When the *Ganges* heaved with a downward roll, Henry slid down the deck with his prisoner neatly tied. They disappeared into the cabin companionway, unseen from the dory or from the hovering, anxious merchant trader.

The man who was left in the dory lingered for some time, shouting until he was weary. Not for the gold of a king's ransom would he have climbed the rope ladder to set foot on the deck of this accursed Indiaman. She was infinitely more sinister than the spectral ship which Parson Cotton Mather had reported as flitting outside the harbor of New Haven in the Connecticut Colony.

Sudden fright seized this lone sailor in the dory.

Frantically he tugged at the oars to flee from this unholy East Indiaman. No sooner had he regained his own vessel than she was seen to make sail and resume her voyage. Her skipper was short eight men and he proposed to lose no more of them. He was no match for the wiles of Satan.

The eighth man, so unexpectedly received from the dory, was praying for mercy in the main cabin. Instead of the violent death which he expected, he was pitched in among his roistering shipmates. They were still obedient to the command to keep silence but Silas Ropes now exhorted them to let the welkin ring and to pass the bottle. A glimpse of British sailor number eight showed him hoisted upon the table while he roared a toast to His Gracious Majesty, King George.

"Here, that won't do, you vipers," shouted Silas Ropes as he surged in again. "By gum and ginger, this is an American ship. You drink to the Union and confusion to all tyrants or I'll clap every one of you in irons."

Ben Gerrish persuaded him to postpone further lessons in patriotism until the morning. They would be in a chastened and penitent mood. Silas agreed to this and blithely added:

"We bagged one more man than we bargained for. Eight of these scalawags and eight of us—by Judas, that makes sixteen of a crew. We ought to shove this blistered old tea-wagon along somehow. Only four

Yankees of us! A round dozen pizen Britishers! By thunder, it sounds like a joke. Time for us to eat. Throw some supper together in the galley, *Mister* Steve Claghorn. Then we eight sober men'll break our backs getting the *Ganges* under way again. It may take half the night."

Shortly after dawn, eight very subdued British seamen were ordered out of the dining-saloon. They stood with hanging heads, nervously shifting their feet, as sad as though expecting the death sentence. A decent lot, Captain Ropes said to himself, and no more than half of them blear-eyed and shaky. Not all of them had made drunken swine of themselves.

" Good-morning, my hearties," said Captain Silas, with a twinkle. " We have treated you well. You'll not deny that. This ship is a prize of war to the American flag. She is bound to the port of Salem on the Massachusetts coast. I have a British officer and three seamen already in my crew. They are satisfied with my terms and will help work the ship. I offer you the same terms, generous pay and my influence to release you on parole in the United States. If you refuse, Heaven help you. If you try to rise against me, you are helpless to handle this ship amongst the eight of you. You will have no arms and at the first sign of mutiny you will be shot down like dogs. What d'ye say? "

" Speaking for the men," answered a clean-built, intelligent sailor who had been the mate of the British

merchant vessel, "we are much better off than if a Yankee privateer had captured our ship. We owe you something for that square meal. And mutiny would be senseless, as you say, sir, with these four other Englishmen already pledged to you."

"Painless warfare," grinned Captain Ropes. "Very well, I shall take your word for it. The promise of wages will make you turn to more willingly although, of course, I'm not obliged to pay you a cussed cent."

In this peaceful manner was the Indiaman's crew increased to sixteen men. To talk of driving her sounded ridiculous. They would do well to make any progress at all. In the India trade the *Ganges* had carried a complement of one hundred officers and seamen. But she had never been commanded by a sinewy Yankee mariner of the breed of Silas Ropes.

He sent all the Englishmen into the forecastle to live by themselves, excepting Dick Webb who was kept aft with the Americans and rated as boatswain. Henry Holter was made chief officer.

"Second mate, are you, young *Mister* Claghorn?" said Silas Ropes. "All right. I'll try you out. If your health won't stand it, let me know. Ben Gerrish helps with his fancy navigation and stands his trick at the wheel."

No more jogging and thrashing about under shortened canvas! If they couldn't reef it, let it blow away. All hands were hustled aloft to put the topgallant-sails

on her. With so few men it was slow and toilsome but no sooner had they finished than Captain Ropes was saying to Henry Holter:

"While this wind holds fair, rig out the studding-sail booms. Reducing her spread of sail when they refitted her in Bilbao was a wicked shame. But we'll make her lay over and groan in spite of it."

The men did their share of the groaning. There was no such thing as a watch below. They slept on deck wherever they dropped. And all through the night hours Captain Ropes was flitting up from his cabin like a restless ghost. When the wind hauled ahead and blew half a gale, they tacked ship until it was like one long-drawn nightmare. If a topgallant-sail split in streamers, they cut away the fragments and bent another as soon as a lull came. They did the work of thirty men.

What mattered it to Stephen Claghorn whether his health could stand it or not? There was no time to think of ailments. He was a cog in a remorseless machine whose pace never slackened. Pride spurred him on, and the inspiration of achievement. To lead his men out on a swaying yard in the middle of a spray-swept night, to show these sturdy British sailors that he could stand the punishment with the best of them, was like winning a battle.

Pervading the whole ship was the soul of the haggard, fiery master on the quarter-deck.

Friend and foe, they strove alike to bring this noble

Ganges into port. Their strife was with the ocean and not with one another. Ashore again, they would be Americans and Englishmen. Now they were sailormen who defied destiny to whip them. They found their reward in every foaming league that the Indiaman left behind her as she plunged to the westward.

" Snugged her down at sunset in the Company trade, did they? " said a British tar. " This 'ere crew could learn 'em a few things. But if it comes to sailin' another voyage with Silas Ropes, they can put me in prison for the rest of the war."

The impossible came true when the scientific Benjamin Gerrish checked the skipper's calculations and agreed with him that they were close enough to the New England coast to proceed more cautiously. Two days later they sighted the low, sandy shore of Cape Cod. Now certain of his position, Captain Ropes cracked on sail again for the short run home across Massachusetts Bay to Salem.

He had been dreading discovery by the British men-of-war blockading Boston harbor but the sea appeared to be clear of them. Thus far the Indiaman had been fortune's favorite.

There was no cause for alarm until a lookout called down:

" A large vessel standing out from shore. I don't like her looks. She looms like a frigate."

CHAPTER XXIV

SILAS ROPES DRIVES HER HOME

THE strange ship which came driving out from the coast, as though to intercept and examine the *Ganges,* failed to please the vigilant inspection of Captain Ropes. He looked at her long and hard and muttered something about a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. However, never say die was more like his doctrine. He told the helmsman to let the ship bear away from the coast.

Then he studied his black sheep of a boatswain, Richard Webb, British smuggler and privateersman, who bore no love for American rebels. Four Americans and twelve Englishmen in this ship's crew! Would these twelve men of an enemy race stand true to their pledges of faithful service when by refusing duty and compelling the ship to surrender they could find refuge in a British frigate, under their own flag?

"What about this ticklish situation, Dick Webb?" anxiously demanded Silas Ropes. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"For my own three seamen and myself, sir, you have the word of a man who was once—who was once an

English gentleman. As for these eight others which we stole out of the merchant vessel, I will help you to make them step lively, whether they like it or not."

The doubtful eight were inclined to hang back and small blame to them. They knew not what treatment awaited them in a hostile land. But when they showed a laggard spirit in going aloft, Stephen Claghorn or Henry Holter was at their heels with the flat of a cutlass. And when one sulky wight incited the others to quit duty, Silas Ropes let a pistol ball fly past his ear.

With a boisterous wind the skipper let his ship go out to sea. The frigate was making a stern chase of it and gaining rapidly. Capture seemed inevitable. The *Ganges* was cut off from a passage into Salem harbor. But the sun-dried, stubborn mariner in command of her had not fetched the Indiaman half across the Western Ocean to lose her within sight of home. His comrades began to comprehend his purpose when the lookout shouted:

"Breakers ahead. Breakers on the starboard bow."

The skipper calmly waved a hand at the helmsmen. They strained at the wheel and the ship changed her course a trifle. She smelled deep water between the shoals and followed the narrow and perilous channel. Henry Holter ran to heave the lead.

"If that blamed British frigate can chase me across Georges' Bank, I'll eat my sea-boots for supper," ex-

claimed Silas Ropes. "Lucky I sailed in a Gloucester fisherman when I was a boy."

It was wildly hazardous to attempt to thread these shoals in a great ship like this Indiaman, but Silas Ropes recalled every turn and twist and the depth of water without a lapse of memory. Once the *Ganges* staggered, her sails shaking in the wind. There was no time to send the men into the rigging to trim the yards.

The ship drifted, her keel scraped the sand. Then she forged ahead as a gust caught her, and so she passed into safer water. The skipper gazed astern and tossed his hat in air as he yelled:

"The frigate followed as far as she dared, but she followed too far. By the eternal, she has stranded—piled up in less than three fathom of water and a falling tide. Well, my blasted Britishers, you won't have any gay reunion with your own folks this day. Yon frigate is gripped by a shoal that will hold her hard and fast. Now ease your helm, lads, and keep her steady as she goes. George's Bank behind us and it's ho for Naumkeag Head!"

This hairbreadth escape from disaster was too much for Stephen Claghorn's weary young mind and body. To the amusement of the quarter-deck he went peacefully to sleep while leaning against a stanchion. Ben Gerrish poked him in the stomach and he murmured with a cavernous yawn:

" Do you want to know what I'm going to do with my prize money? Buy a farm, by jingo! And I'll stand all my watches in bed."

Stephen was an alert, wide-awake young second mate when the *Ganges* surged across the Salem bar. The bright dream had come true in spite of all misfortunes. A string of signal flags from the tower on Naumkeag Head told the town that a prize was entering port. A multitude of people came running down to see this magnificent East Indiaman whose own signals informed them that she had been taken by Captain Jonathan Haraden off the coast of Spain.

The ships at Derby Wharf displayed their bunting. Their guns boomed salutes. The battery of the *Ganges* made thunderous response. Boats came swarming out from shore, a joyous flotilla. Presently the Indiaman's decks were crowded with landsmen and seafarers who were vociferous in praise and congratulations. Among them were boyish friends of Stephen Claghorn who regarded him with awe and forbore to call him " Fatty." It was just as his fancy had portrayed this home-coming.

As soon as the sails were furled, Captain Ropes called his doughty young second mate aside and said:

" There is your mother's house, *Mister* Steve Claghorn, almost abreast of us. Better hop along and surprise her. Report aboard to-morrow and we'll warp the ship in to the wharf. By the way, I hope to command a

privateer ere long. It will please me to have you go as second mate."

This was a reward more precious than prize money. Stephen's voice was unsteady as he replied:

" Thank you, sir, with all my heart, but I belong in Captain Jonathan Haraden's ship. I feel bound to sail the next cruise with him."

On another occasion had a crowd of Salem men and boys hoisted Stephen Claghorn upon their shoulders and carried him up the hill to the fair brick mansion with the walled garden that almost lipped the tide. And again the clamor summoned Mistress Polly Claghorn to the gate. Amazement almost stunned her. She stood with arms outstretched and could not speak.

Very dear and beautiful she appeared to the boy who had come back from manifold dangers by sea and land. Before her trembling lips could find words to express the love of an overflowing heart, he had taken her in his arms. Like sweethearts they were as he led her into the house, away from the gaze of the cheering crowd.

" But Stephen," she cried, all tears and laughter, " I have never heard a word of you since you sailed away in the brig *Atlantic* with Captain Spencer Colt, almost a year ago. I tried so hard to be brave and patient, but, oh, I was sorely afraid I had lost you."

" I got delayed more or less but I was never actually lost," the hero carelessly assured her. " All kinds of things happen to a man in time of war, mother darling.

You see, I was sent home in a prize. That's how I happen to be here. Now about Captain Spencer Colt. It is a delicate matter, I suppose—but he is in prison in Plymouth and so lacking in spunk that he will never break out as I did. He can stay there for all me. My advice to you is to forget him."

Pretty Mistress Claghorn was dumfounded. She had sent her son away in charge of that brave and dashing sea-fighter, Spencer Colt, nor had she been willing to let him sail with any one else. She stammered a few words of puzzled protest but the high-handed Stephen exclaimed:

"Nonsense, mother. Have you seen him in action? He shines far better in a lady's parlor than on a cruiser's quarter-deck."

"I must listen to a masterful man like my Stephen," sighed the flustered lady, in humble accents. "Mercy, the rough voice of him, and the bone and muscle. Very well, let us dismiss Captain Spencer Colt. Whatever has become of Master Benjamin Gerrish?"

"Ah, there is a *man!*" fondly cried the lad. "The old trump came home with me in the *Ganges*. He will be bowling along presently to pay his respects to you. Ben has improved until he is as desperate a villain as roams the seas. He told me Salem cramped his talents and it was a true word. Harken to me, mother dear, if you have any notion of signing articles—you know what I mean, to recruit a stepfather for me—permit me to

recommend the old trump. Only six years younger than you, Mother, but in experience he is as old as sin."

"Bless my heart, I have no serious intentions whatever," exclaimed Polly Claghorn, with a blush and a dimple. "If ever I do tire of my single condition, you will be my adviser, Stephen. I should not dare think of defying you. Alas, your nose is as crooked as ever and now both your cheeks are scarred. I feared you might be sensitive and I was loth to mention it. But I vow you are the handsomer for it."

"Powder burns. Mere trifles," explained the veteran. "I was trying to blow up the big Indiaman. It was brisk work with Jonathan Haraden."

"With Jonathan Haraden, of all things!" she cried. "Why, that man swims in blood, Stephen. And he is a deacon of the North Meeting House congregation! And you are alive to tell me of sailing with *him?* You take my breath!"

"Aye, and waiting to go again. I'll spin the yarn to you, bit by bit. But you must come aboard the Indiaman to-morrow and meet Silas Ropes and Henry Holter and a staunch rascal of an Englishman named Dick Webb."

Mistress Polly Claghorn's brain was all awhirl as her worshipful son began to untwist his tangled skein of adventure. So abundant was her pride and gratitude that she made no more foolish objection to his going to sea again in the service of his country. He was a Clag-

horn through and through and she would have him be nothing else.

After another day, Captain Silas Ropes had no more work for the crew of the *Ganges*. The parole which he had promised the British seamen was confirmed by the American authorities ashore. These honest fellows, who deserved well of their captors, had their pockets filled with dollars and spent them in the Salem taverns. After long delay they were sent home to England in exchange for American sailors held prisoners by the enemy.

Mr. Richard Webb was true to his colors in refusing to acknowledge the Yankees as anything else than pirates and rebels. However, the story of his honorable compact with Captain Ropes made friends for him. He resumed the dress and manners of a gentleman, wearing them with ease and dignity, and Mistress Polly Claghorn invited him to dine, as a shipmate of Stephen. That the engaging rascal made an impression on the lady's fickle heart there was no room for doubt. With Stephen as a watchful guardian and chaperon, however, there was no danger of a sentimental alliance with the enemy.

It was good to be at home and to loaf on Derby Wharf among the privateer ships and hear the gossip of distant seas and stirring actions. The American forces on land were sore beset and often discouraged, but the armed ships of Salem were winging it seaward to win fresh

laurels, crippling England's trade and taking thousands of her prime seamen as prisoners of war.

Stephen waxed impatient after six weeks of waiting in idleness for the return of Captain Jonathan Haraden. Meanwhile Silas Ropes had been given command of a fine privateering brig which flew the Derby house flag. He lost no time in fitting her for sea. With his dry grin he said to Stephen, at parting:

" I was ready to forgive Ben Gerrish for being so cluttered up with science and education but he refuses to go along with me. He seems to have tied up with you till this cruel war is over. I don't suppose I'll ever make as amusin' a cruise as the one in the old *Ganges.* I hope to fight the Britishers and to take vessels and prisoners in this new ship of mine, but I can't really expect to bait 'em with vittles and drink. If the seafarin' end of the war was all like that, you'd see such a rush of recruits that General Washington 'ud be left with nary a foot soldier or dragoon."

" A fair wind and a lucky cruise, Captain Silas," said Stephen, " and I hope we'll meet again but *not* in the Old Mill Prison."

It was only a few days after this that the little *General Pickering* came sailing in to Salem port. Ah, but they gave Jonathan Haraden a welcome to surpass that which had greeted the arrival of the stately East Indiaman. Six shipmasters, from the vessels in harbor, did him the honor of pulling the oars of the boat which car-

ried him ashore. Stephen Claghorn, with shining face, was waiting to meet his commander at the wharf. The illustrious sea captain was moved by genuine affection as he embraced the lad whom he had last seen as an invalid in the house of the Spanish grandee of Bilbao.

"We brought the *Ganges* safe across, sir," exclaimed the jubilant Stephen. "Have you heard that I lost the prize master and his men but picked up a new skipper and crew? And I came home as second mate."

"The pilot told me something of it," replied Captain Haraden. "Silas Ropes, eh? You showed your shrewdness in choosing a skipper. You must have regained lusty health or Silas would have killed you with work. Second mate, were you? If you were good enough for Captain Ropes, I ask no more. Will you sail with me in the same berth?"

"With you, in the *Pickering,* sir, as second mate?" gasped Stephen, unable to believe his ears. "Whew, I never did expect to be as proud and happy as this."

"Now about that unlucky prize master and his crew that were spirited out of the *Ganges,*" exclaimed the puzzled Jonathan Haraden, "we must dine together, Steve, and thrash out the yarn at our leisure."

This was the flaw in Stephen's contented existence. No word had come back from the master mariner and his two dozen men, Americans and Spaniards, who had vanished and left him alone in the *Ganges* in mid-ocean. Stephen had found himself waking up at night to stare

at the ceiling and wonder and discard this explanation or that. Nor were his seafaring friends of Salem able to offer a satisfactory solution. Even Benjamin Gerrish, with his active intellect and acute sense of smell, had to confess himself beaten.

CHAPTER XXV

STEPHEN FINDS AN OLD FRIEND

WHEN the *General Pickering* was made ready to steer for the open sea again, there was no need for the recruiting officer to drum them to the tavern rendezvous. Captain Haraden had his choice of the finest seamen in the port. Master Benjamin Gerrish signed the articles as navigator and was tremendously elated. At last his talents were to be properly appreciated. No more would he be insulted as a land-lubber. When he called to say farewell to Mistress Polly Claghorn, it was as an officer of the quarter-deck, smart blue coat, gold braid, and a sword at his side. He was also a man of substance, with a handsome sum in prize money tucked away to his account.

No longer did he play the rôle of a sighing suitor. War was his mistress now. He thought of nothing else. Stephen felt a sense of relief. He was happier at having Ben Gerrish as a chum than a stepfather. Once again a fond mother kissed her boy in the doorway of the brick mansion and waved a handkerchief from the walled garden as a ship stood out to cross the bar.

Stephen Finds an Old Friend

During the early weeks of this voyage, the *Pickering* was compelled to battle for her life against the hostile elements. One furious gale followed another. The moods of the ocean were savage and implacable. It was to marvel that a small ship, a fabric of wood and canvas and cordage, could survive the assaults of the mountainous seas and shrieking winds. The anxious officers and bone-weary seamen forsook all intention of seeking the enemy. They thought only of saving their own lives.

It was in the midst of one of these wild gales that the crew of the struggling *Pickering* beheld such a spectacle as they were to remember to the end of their days. Sea and sky were a swirling smother of spray and spume when one ship after another came reeling out of the westward. A huge three-decker of a battleship wallowed dismasted, decks swept, gun-ports streaming, rolling so far down that her keel was visible. A crippled frigate fled under a few rags of sail, apparently staunch and under control. Presently, however, the bows dove under, the stern lifted high in air, and the doomed frigate foundered in a twinkling, blotted out.

A few dots, a glimpse of wreckage, and the ravening sea had extinguished the hundreds of souls aboard the lost frigate. There was no chance to save them, even to make the attempt. A large merchant ship was visible, cast upon her beam ends, the sailors hewing at the shrouds and masts to cut them away. Another vessel

came careering out of the mist and bore down upon the *Pickering*. Collision was avoided by God's mercy.

Lashed in the rigging, Captain Haraden shouted in the ear of his first officer:

"A British convoy! We are right in the thick of them. There may be a hundred sail for all we know."

"And ships sinking before our very eyes," was the reply. "These big men-of-war are top-heavy with guns and a gale like this'll send some of 'em to Davy Jones."

There was no spirit of elation that such terrible misfortune should overtake the enemy but rather a profound compassion for all those brave seamen condemned to drown. The night came down and shrouded the tragedy from the sight of the Yankee privateer which labored so indomitably to stay afloat. Now and then there was a wan gleam of a ship's light or the appealing message of a rocket as it cut a thin red line against the sky.

The storm subsided before the dawn. It had blown itself out. The ocean was all upheaved but the wind had ceased to be a deadly menace. Not a sail of the scattered and broken convoy was visible. Some had perished and others were beyond the horizon. The sailors of the *Pickering* toiled at the pumps to lift the water out of the strained and leaking hull. Torn sails were cut away, new canvas spread. The privateer was able to resume her course.

Stephen Finds an Old Friend

Stephen Claghorn was swaying upon a foot-rope far out on the bowsprit while he showed three seamen how to bend a head-sail. He wiped the spray from his eyes and glanced at the sea. A little beyond the ship was a drifting spar and a trailing tangle of rigging which rose and fell upon the green backs of the billows. Stephen looked again and caught a glimpse of what appeared to be a bundle of clothing attached to the spar.

It was a drowned sailor. Could there be a spark of life in him? As the ship forged ahead, Stephen clawed his way inboard from the bowsprit, caught up a coil of line, knotted one end under his shoulders, and shouted to his men to stand by. Diving from the bow, he came up alongside the ship and swam strongly to the drifting spar with its lifeless burden. With his sheath knife he cut the rope with which the poor castaway had lashed himself to the spar. Then Stephen made him fast in a loop of the coil of line and waved a hand to the seamen of the *Pickering*.

The ship was moving slowly, being close hauled. The helmsmen promptly threw her into the wind. Strong arms hauled at the line until Stephen and his human salvage were lifted to the bulwark. It was no great exploit for the young second mate who was as much at home in the water as a porpoise. He was water-logged and out of breath but needed only a shift of dry clothing to go back to his duty.

His intuition had been correct. There was a glimmer

of life in the sodden derelict of a seaman, as the ship's surgeon discovered. The poor wretch was put into a bunk, stripped and rubbed and powerfully stimulated, but hours passed before he began to revive. A great bruise on the side of his head indicated that he had been stunned during his conflict with the sea. At the end of a watch on deck, Stephen went in to look at him. The face on the pillow, all pinched and white, had a familiar aspect.

It was perplexing. Where had this man been met before? A British bluejacket by his dress, evidently a survivor of one of the lost men-of-war of the convoy. The man opened his eyes and muttered something in no more than a ghost of a whisper. Stephen bent over him to listen but the waxen lips ceased to move. It seemed, for an instant, as though the recognition had been mutual. The man's eyes had lighted with a flash of intelligence which flickered and was gone.

Stephen stood absorbed in painful thought, striving to catch and hold the elusive memory which had been evoked in this strange manner. It was like a fleeting breath on the surface of a mirror. Then he *knew*. It came to him in a flash of absolute certainty. Dumfounded, he cried out:

"Jim Eldridge—he was one of the prize master's crew aboard the *Ganges*, and the best man of the lot! I can swear this is Eldridge."

At the sound of his name, the man in the bunk again

opened his eyes. The muscles of his face twitched. Barely audible were the muttered words:

" Aye—*Ganges*—Eldridge—all hands gone ——"

Gone whither? This was what Stephen greatly desired to know. But this ghostly Jim Eldridge was unable to reveal the secret. Once more he lay as still and silent as death itself. While Stephen stood waiting by the bunk, Ben Gerrish stole in to join him. After being told who the man was, Ben sorrowfully shook his head as he said:

" I doubt if he tells you much more, Steve. The surgeon fears he has not long to live. The blow on the head was a mortal injury. He may linger for days but a black cloud will be upon his mind."

" He knew who I was, Ben, and he tried to explain what had happened to the *Ganges*. *' All hands gone,'* said he."

" But you knew that much already," sighed Master Gerrish. " 'Tis one mystery on top of another. Here we find him wrecked in a British man-of-war and enlisted in the king's service. What of his mates that sailed with you from Bilbao in the Indiaman? "

" I must report this to Captain Haraden," said Stephen. " He will be mightily interested. He often mentions it."

The commander invited Stephen into his cabin and was, indeed, aroused by the news that the sea had given up a man of that strangely missing prize crew. For

all his valor in action, Captain Haraden was a man of tender sympathies. He was moved to say:

" I had looked forward to dividing a goodly share of prize money among those men. They had need of it. And they did their duty, even though it was their hard fate to quit the *Ganges* and leave the voyage unfinished. I have put the money away for them, on the chance that they may be found some day. This Jim Eldridge, do you know aught of him or his affairs? "

" He hailed from Marblehead, sir. I remember talking with him aboard ship. And he is a married man with a baby or two. He was sore homesick for them and impatient with the slow gait of the lubberly old *Ganges.*"

"A sorrowful matter, if he must slip his cable," said Captain Haraden, " but his widow shall not want nor the little ones lack bread. Now I would urge you, Steve, to spend what time you can spare with this poor man. Perchance the sight of you may move him to speech. Would to Heaven I could discover what had befallen the prize master and his crew."

And so it happened that during the hours when he should have been sleeping, Stephen Claghorn sat beside the silent bunk in the little room and watched and waited for the signs of consciousness. Seaman James Eldridge, merchant mariner of Marblehead, was very slowly letting go his feeble hold on life. Once or twice he smiled at Stephen, as one old shipmate to another. And when Stephen held his hand there was a faint, responsive

pressure. Accustomed though he was to the shock and carnage of war, it was a trying ordeal for young Stephen to endure. But it comforted him to think that he was making it a little easier for this lonely seaman remote from home and loved ones.

On a bright morning when the sea had become quite smooth, the stricken Jim Eldridge seemed suddenly to revive. He looked up at Stephen and exclaimed in a strong voice:

"We had to leave you, lad. 'Twas no fault of ours—the good old *Ganges*—the queerest game that ever was ——"

The voice faltered and died. Stephen leaned over to say:

"I'm listening, Jim. What made you quit the ship?"

The seaman paid no heed. His fitful flare of energy had died. For a long time he was motionless. Then he astonished Stephen by raising himself upon his elbow while he called out:

"Starboard watch on deck! Aye, sir, I'm comin' on the run."

These were the last words of James Eldridge, able seaman. He had harkened to the call of duty and gone to meet the Great Commander. And may we all face the end as bravely, thinking not of ourselves but of some worthy task which we had tried obediently to fulfill.

The crew of the *Pickering* was given little time for mourning. Soon after this, an armed merchant ship

was sighted, her topmasts shattered, canvas blown away. Captain Haraden made sail to snap up this tempting prize which had belonged to the ill-fated convoy. He had no more than cleared ship for action, however, when the lookouts reported a frigate as bearing down to protect the crippled merchantman. This was more than the little Yankee privateer had bargained for. She preferred to let the British frigate alone. This would be a much tougher nut to crack than the East Indiaman had been.

It turned out to be a sensational stern chase. The wind died to a gentle zephyr. The frigate was fast and nimble. Captain Haraden ordered his boats out, four of them, and a hawser was passed from the bow of the ship. Strung in a line, the boats pulled with might and main to tow the *Pickering* out of range of the frigate's guns. Then the frigate manned her own boats with brawny bluejackets, and so these hostile crews sweated and tugged all through a weary day. Aboard the two ships, the sails were wetted down with the hose to make them hold the light wind.

The frigate, with her hundreds of seamen to relieve each other at the oars, crept a trifle nearer the privateer as the afternoon wore late, near enough to fire her bow guns. One ball flew over the *Pickering's* decks and plumped into the boat of which Second Mate Stephen Claghorn was in charge. The bottom of that unfortunate boat was split open like a ripe cheese. It

dropped from under its astonished oarsmen. They floundered in the sea and yelled for help until another boat fished them out. An oak splinter had been driven deep into Stephen's thigh, disabling him.

Luckily a brisk slant of wind just then favored the plucky *Pickering*. Captain Haraden recalled his boats and they were hastily hoisted on board. Crowding on every stitch of sail that could be spread, the privateer hauled on the wind, peppered the frigate with a saucy broadside, and drove away to the southward. It had been a narrow escape but the peril was past.

Stephen made light of his injury but the surgeon informed this unruly patient:

"You seem to be the only casualty of this lively frigate action, so I shall have to make the most of it. You must keep quiet for a week or so. Then you may have a chance to go ashore and hobble about. I am told that the ship will put into a French port for stores and repairs. All that nasty weather has shaken her like a man who has fallen down three flights of stairs."

This was how Stephen happened to be loafing on the quays of Bordeaux a fortnight later. He had been given shore liberty and was living in a room above a pleasant little café down among the haunts of sailormen. He was at dinner when at a table in another corner he chanced to observe a sedate, middle-aged man who looked like a merchant mariner. Staring hard at him, Stephen blinked and was ready to vow that he beheld a phantom.

But this solid seafarer in the corner was enjoying a very substantial meal. Like an uncanny echo came to mind the broken words of the dead Jim Eldridge:

"*Ganges*—all hands gone—the queerest game that ever was ——"

Leaning on a cane, Stephen limped across the café and clapped a hand upon the mariner's shoulder. The amazement was mutual. The lost prize master of the *Ganges* almost slid out of his chair. He, too, appeared to be gazing at a robust ghost. Then they pounded each other and shook hands and talked so loud that the windows rattled. Frenchmen at the other tables found amusement in the antics of the mad Americans.

"If you were alive, why didn't you send some word to Salem?" bawled Stephen.

"But you fell overboard and got drowned before we left the *Ganges,*" vociferated the prize master. "You couldn't be found, I'll take my oaths on a stack of Bibles to that."

"You left me alone in the ship ——"

"Then how did you get out of her?"

"Took her home, of course."

"You're a gay young liar, Steve Claghorn."

"Stow that and come along with me. Never mind your dinner. I'll find you another one," exclaimed the youngster as he grasped the prize master's arm. They charged full tilt out of the café, Stephen and his cane pounding along the pavement. At the nearest quay a

French boatman was found. He rowed these two lunatics off to the *General Pickering* and they scrambled up the gangway. Into the captain's cabin they bolted without ceremony. He was dining alone, as usual, and greeted the intruders with a serene and dignified courtesy which could not be ruffled. As though the prize master were quite an ordinary visitor, Captain Jonathan Haraden exclaimed:

"I am very glad to see you aboard. You and Mr. Claghorn will sit down with me, of course."

"B-but I thought you would fairly jump out of your boots, sir," stammered Stephen who was comically crestfallen. "This is—this is pro-prodigious, sir."

"I grant you that," returned the captain, with a smile, "but unless somebody remains calm, you will turn this cabin into a bedlam. Never was I more curious and surprised than I am at this moment. My missing prize master! And this comes on the heels of our finding his man Eldridge adrift and dying."

"And so you found him? Wrecked, was he?" the prize master exclaimed. "And he could not tell you of our misfortunes?"

"Not a word," put in Stephen. "It is for you to ease our minds. The thing has plagued us night and day."

"No more than your fate has tormented me," returned the prize master as he settled himself in a chair and went on to say, "It happened to us so sudden that I could scarce believe it myself. You remember the

day well enough, Stephen, when you went into the hold —nothing in sight and the old *Ganges* making easy weather of it. I was feeling in good spirits myself, though I'm a man that is prone to worry. Out of the south'ard came a British line-of-battle ship, a ninety-gun three-decker that stood up like the Rock of Gibraltar. No business of ours, I said to myself. We were flying British colors and anybody with half an eye could see it was a Company ship."

"Very true," remarked Captain Haraden. "What excuse could the three-decker find for meddling with you?"

"We soon enough found out," was the grim answer. "Whilst we were admiring the picture she made, this infernal line-of-battle ship changed her course and came up to us. Even then we looked for no trouble. I had calculated she would dip her colors to the East India Company's pennant and pass on her way. But she hove to and lowered two boats. Filled with armed bluejackets, they were, at least twoscore men.

"They came pourin' over the side of my ship, in charge of a bad-mannered swab of a lieutenant. He demanded a muster of my seamen. I had to invent a yarn on the moment to explain why I was so short-handed. The Lord gave me no gift of gab and I made stumbling work of it. Besides this, the cut of my jib was against me. I didn't look like a pot-bellied, red-nosed old Company commander.

" The lieutenant cursed me for a clumsy liar and a Yankee rebel to boot. The three-decker had been in tropical waters, said he, and was rotten with the Spanish fever. A hundred men of her company were dead and as many more stretched in their hammocks. The ship was a floating pest-house. She was ready to press any men she could lay her hands on, Britisher, Yankee, or what not. So my small crew was lined up, and half of 'em Spaniards at that.

" The lieutenant threw every mother's son of us into the boats. The Spaniards jabbered but it was no use. They were good enough seamen to help work the man-of-war home to England. She was under orders to proceed home with all dispatch and join a cruising squadron which was fitting out for service against the United States. There was a commodore aboard, or some important old duffer like that—all gout and short temper.

" No time to bother with a valuable prize like the *Ganges* and no men to put in her! We were dragged off with the clothes we stood in. I tell you, Stephen, the thing was begun and finished in no more time than it takes to explain it to you."

" Whisked off, you surely were," said Stephen, " and I was peacefully snoring in the hold. Of course I never dreamed that such a rich prize would be abandoned. That's where all my theories got jammed in a clove-hitch."

"The Royal Navy was in a tearin' hurry," glumly observed the prize master. "It was a tough voyage to England. Four of my men died of fever before we reached Falmouth. The rest of us had wasted to shadows and were 'most too weak to turn to for duty, barring Jim Eldridge of Marblehead. Stout of limb and big of heart was this man that had sailed four years with me in the merchant service. At Falmouth they refused to send him ashore, calling him a British subject, the perjured liars. He was crimped by the Royal Navy and sent off to sea in the *Royal Sovereign* seventy-four. They threw me and my men into the Old Mill Prison as rebels and that was all the thanks we got."

"Was Captain Spencer Colt of Salem still in the prison?" eagerly inquired Stephen.

"Aye, he was then, but now he is somewhere about here in Bordeaux, but not parading himself. The spirit of the man is broken. He will be no more good in command of a fighting ship. It was this way with me, d'ye see. Our American privateers have been taking so many English prisoners that a system of exchange was arranged. You may have heard of it before you left Salem on this cruise. I am one of a party that was sent over from Plymouth to Bordeaux a fortnight ago. We expect to sail for Boston next week in a cartel, or flag of truce, carrying eighty American officers and men. Now for your end of the tale, Stephen. I am merely an accident of war but you are a blooming miracle."

" I found part of a crew," laughed Stephen. " They were homeward bound from the Scilly Islands. And we crimped the rest of 'em from an English merchant vessel. Taking it by and large, the *Ganges* was a lucky ship."

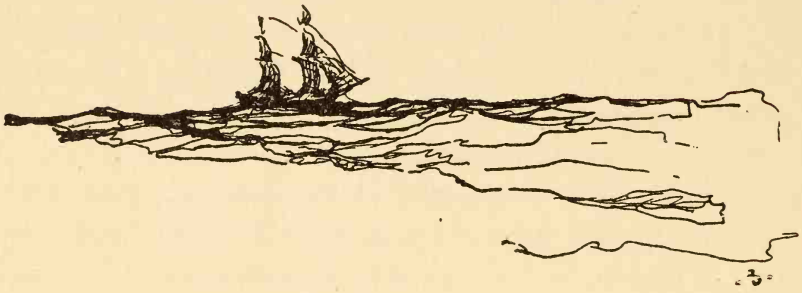
" For them that survived her," said the prize master. " Well, if you kidnapped enough Britishers to finish the voyage, it helped make it tit for tat with the thief of a line-of-battle ship that scuppered me and my good men."

At this moment Master Benjamin Gerrish entered the cabin. Stephen turned to the prize master and excitedly announced:

" Here is the wicked sea-rover who can tell you how the *Ganges* was salvaged. He was once a solemn old schoolmaster but he is mighty well cured of that. His yarn will make you laugh."

Captain Haraden gazed at the faces of these three men, the gently nurtured youngster from the brick mansion in Salem, the scholar who had abandoned his desk, the merchant shipmaster who had endured and suffered many things. Of a truth, they were ready to pledge their lives and fortunes anew in the sacred cause of their country and their flag. They had been tried and found not wanting. Of such was the spirit of '76. Said Jonathan Haraden, sailor and gentleman:

" Alas for the good men that you lost from your crew,

prize master. But all's well that ends well. And may we live and stay afloat to say the same of this righteous war for Independence."

THE END